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Actors as Embodied Public Intellectuals:
Reanimating Consciousness, Community and Activism
Through Oral History Interviewing and Solo Performance
in an Intertextual Method of Actor Training

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by

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I dedicate this dissertation to friends, colleagues and collaborators, and everyone else whose presence in my life makes up my identity.

But especially for their love and enduring support for my scholarly and theatrical endeavors, this is for my family:

Mary Ann Hyland-Murr, Ken Hyland-Murr, Michael, Zach and Paloma Steiger, Peggy Hyland, Pat Feger, Jane Hyland, Shaun Alvey, Albert Steiger, III, and my grandmother, Mary Helen Hyland.

Acknowledgments

Since this is a dissertation that is ultimately about how identity is made from multiple people and interactions, it is probably fairly clear that I don't see my work as a solo endeavor. I am deeply indebted to everyone who was involved.

First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Stacy Wolf, for her continuing patience, support and encouragement, as well as her outstanding judgment and useful suggestions for expansion and clarification. She has been an exceptional mentor, conversant and reader, and without her assistance I would never have finished. Thanks also to the other members of my committee—Jill Dolan, Joni Jones/Omi Osun Olomo, Charlotte Canning, Mary Kearney and Elizabeth Richmond-Garza—for reading and commenting on my work, and for challenging me in their courses to broaden my thinking about theatre, identity, community, history and culture.

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Actors as Embodied Public Intellectuals:

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Through Oral History Interviewing and Solo Performance

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In the United States, professional actor training programs that specialize in variations of Stanislavski's System are the realm of "legitimate" actors. Scholarly fields like performance studies draw students with goals of intellectual analysis and social engagement. Experimental approaches to training, autobiographical performance, and community-based processes are studied in these academic areas. To overcome this bias, I historicize American actor training programs and contextualize Stanislavski and his followers as participants in an ongoing intellectual conversation about identity, desire, action and the body.

In the global capitalist environment, it is crucial to replace the Cold War conceptual framework of containment, which characterizes artists with commercial goals as "insiders" and those resisting dominant culture as "outsiders," with a metaphor that prioritizes commonality and positive action *and* values history and difference. Drawing

on Jill Dolan's theory of "utopian performatives," which "represent … an imaginative construction of both thought and action … everyday life and theatrical performance," I argue that the lens through which we envision bodies, identity formation, and social engagement can be changed through a deliberate collaboration between performance studies and professional actor training curricula. I propose adopting an intertextual process of building characters for plays through "monopolylogues" that combine Anna Deavere Smith's ethnographic interviewing techniques with Method and Brecht-inspired tools, Viewpoints, and solo performance composition. By physicalizing questions about identity and community, experience and imagination, subjectivity and objectivity and the body and technology, this technique re-theorizes individual identity as an ongoing and changing process that relies on embodied interactions with other people and with history.

The dramaturgy of Charles L. Mee's *The Trojan Women: A Love Story*, which I directed at The University of Texas in 2003, suggests a dialectical relationship between reality and imagination that this process reflects. Preparing to act in Phyllis Nagy's *The Strip* by piecing together an identity via interviews with drag performers and travelers mirrored the character's journey, and highlights how this technique transforms dominant ideologies of gender and sexuality through naturalizing queerness and theatricalizing "the real." My hope is that introducing this method through similar projects can restore actors' power as intellectuals and agents of transformation**.**

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Introduction: The American Actor and the Public Intellectual—A Love Story

I will set the stage with a caveat, if only to confess right away what may be the most obvious criticism of the work I am presenting: I am writing this dissertation because I am what you might call a frustrated actor. Beginning with a caveat seems appropriate, since my frustrations (and consequently this entire project) stem from warnings and admonitions. This work is the product of a romance with acting, and is infused with all of the attendant elation and complication, desire and excitement, disappointment and hope and anxiety and confusion—all of the inevitable drama that sometimes arises in an ongoing intimate relationship. Like many, many actors, at a young age I fell in love with (and fell in love *in*) theatre classes and rehearsals. I was exhilarated by the possibility of getting inside the skin of another person; I was turned on by the emotionally and physically charged exchanges between me, my fellow artists and audiences, and was comforted and encouraged by the support and dedication of those collaborators; I was engaged and frustrated and often transformed by the challenge of interpreting the words and ideas of Shakespeare or Tennessee Williams or Paula Vogel or Samuel Beckett through my physical and intellectual labor; and I was both thrilled and frightened by the risks and possibilities of putting my live body on stage in front of an audience. When I was in rehearsal or performing, time was suspended and life and the world seemed fascinating and full and productive, so I always dreamed (and still sometimes do, for that matter) of having a career on the stage or in films. But also as for many lovers of theatre, acting was the irresistibly attractive but troubled, dangerous, and unpredictable lover from whom experienced, knowledgeable and responsible adults who cared about my

stability and respectability tried to steer me away. I was warned, diverted, and sometimes encouraged, but always with concern or qualifications.

Usually, teachers, directors, fellow artists and friends kindly made the attempt to reassure me that their concerns had little to do with my abilities onstage. I was always dedicated and focused, and there were many who expressed the opinion that I had some "talent" and "presence." But their concerns about my choosing a career as an actor were always, inevitably, twofold: that my intelligence would be wasted if I chose to be an actor, and that I needed a more stable profession to "fall back on." In other words, I shouldn't choose a partner who wouldn't be able to provide for me or be my intellectual equal. I remember that when I graduated from college with a degree in English and Dramatic Arts, a professor pointed out that I was good at research and writing, and should think about getting a PhD *instead of* trying to act. I was insulted. I wasn't offended by his suggestion that I get an academic degree, but was frustrated by the continued assumption that if I chose to be an actor, I wouldn't be using my skills as an intelligent critical thinker. How could he not recognize that being an actor *is,* essentially, an immensely important and relevant way of doing scholarly research and writing? Acting stimulates an awareness of history, sociology, anthropology, biology, philosophy, spirituality, music, dance and visual arts; it often stems from active and rigorous interpretations of dramatic and other literature; it demands a deep engagement with one's environment and one's body; and it contributes images of how to behave in the world and models how to be an active, energetic and focused member of a community. So I became determined to prove that this supposed delinquent from the wrong side of the tracks was,

in reality, as strong and capable and intelligent as any other choice I might make, just misunderstood and misrepresented. I wanted to believe that acting would treat me right, that we were meant to be together even if people had the ridiculous notion that I was somehow lowering my standards.

I must admit, though, that part of me shared some of the uncertainty voiced by my advisors and mentors. I secretly had some worry that "professional" acting might not be for me, not because we weren't a good match, but because the world seemed to be set up in a way that continually undermined our attempts at a healthy relationship. I was afraid the hurdles we would have to leap in defending our right to be together would be too complicated and exhausting, would outweigh the satisfaction and joy of our pairing, and eventually would kill the romance. Always having maintained an awareness of how the work actors do is socially and culturally relevant, for example, I was worried that I would have to be in the position of being a vehicle for ideas with which I didn't agree, as it seemed that the power of creating meaning would be in the hands of those paying me to be on stage. I also suspected that my physical appearance was not one that would automatically catch the attention or meet the needs of agents or casting directors, and I was uninterested in spending valuable time, energy and money on changing the way I looked. My temperament posed some issues, as well. I was too shy and introspective to learn how to network properly and meet the kind of people who could help my career along. And, admittedly, I was easily disheartened by rejection. But acting was without a doubt the love of my life, and I still wanted more than anything for things to work out for us.

It became clear that I had to make a choice: I could either become a "real" actor (that is, one who makes money at the profession of acting), or I could find a way to adjust the rules and change the definition of what an actor is so that I would fit into that category. Although I have the utmost respect and admiration for (and envy of) people who have the courage, resilience, savvy, and love of acting to pursue it as a professional career, as of yet I have never truly tried my hand at the "business" of acting. Instead, I entered a PhD program with the intention of challenging the idea that a person's status as an intellectual or activist seemed, to most people, contradictory to a desire to pursue a career in acting. I didn't want to jump over to the dangerous side of the tracks to satisfy my longing for the volatile bad boy, nor did I want to capitulate to the more stable neighborhood of the more respectable types. I wanted to do away with the railroad and rip up the tracks once and for all so that you couldn't tell which was "right" and which was "wrong"; everybody would be on the same side.

This goal—the questioning and eventual elimination of the boundaries between disciplines—is a familiar one in the current global cultural and economic environment, in which the interdisciplinary and international exchange that characterized postmodernism happens so quickly and easily that differences are becoming increasingly difficult to recognize. Importantly, though, while globalization relies on the circulation of images and information through electronic technology, it has also been accompanied by an increased awareness of how human bodies carry out the knowledge and ideologies circulated across the globe by various media. This is why it seems to me urgent that live actors, in particular, recognize their roles as public intellectuals who investigate the way

human bodies perform identity, philosophy and community. Especially in a political climate characterized by deception in the service of increasing the power and property of a small group, which results in the increased suffering of more and more people's bodies, actors are in a unique position to both expose the truth and imagine a new possible future**.** While capitalism sweeps the globe using rhetoric of sameness, democracy and freedom, but in actuality promoting the accumulation of more and more personal property and money, actors in the theatre must negotiate what it means to have a live and local body that is shaped by living in a world dominated by electronic technology and capitalism. Actors and audiences together can explore the absolutely crucial possibilities of creating commonality while also tolerating and encouraging difference, listening closely to each other, and focusing on pleasure and love, history and community.

Anna Deavere Smith is a contemporary actor who embraces her role as a public intellectual and devotes herself to questions of civic engagement and the embodiment of democracy. In May of 2006, I was fortunate to attend a workshop production of her recent work in progress, *Let Me Down Easy,* at Zachary Scott Theatre in Austin. The human body is the topic of this series of interviews: the things it can and cannot do, what contributes to its health, suffering or pleasure, what it means to inhabit a body in the current global climate. In Austin, she mostly performed interviews she had conducted with local people: Mack Brown, the coach of the University of Texas football team, former Texas Governor Ann Richards discussing her struggle with esophageal cancer, employees of the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston and a young woman seeking treatment there, and a local male escort, among others. The theatre is a small space with a

thrust stage, and so Deavere Smith's own body was in close proximity to the audience. Because this was a workshop production, she held a script and addressed the audience directly between interviews, casually commenting on the work she had been doing.

I had never seen a live performance of Anna Deavere Smith's in the past, although I have been studying her work for years. I was struck by how generous she seemed as a performer and person and was completely impressed, at the same time, by her focus, commitment, intelligence, energy and virtuosity. Her presence was extraordinary without being intimidating or threatening, and she seemed genuinely interested in having an exchange with the audience and creating a community in the room that also included the people outside the theatre whose bodies she was making present through her performance (interestingly, I was particularly saddened the moment I heard of Governor Richards' recent death: I felt as if I had known her personally and had a different relationship with her because of having seen this performance). A number of local theatre and health professionals, spiritual leaders and activists were asked to join Deavere Smith on stage for a post-show discussion, and audience members were encouraged to ask questions of the panel. I recognized some members of the audience as regular theatre-goers, but it was unclear to me to what degree many of the people in the room were familiar with live theatre and performance. As I listened to people's questions and comments, I noticed that they seemed stimulated and engaged in ways participants in theatre talk-backs often are not. In general, these audience members seemed quite moved that someone would take the time and energy to listen to "regular people" and give their voices equal weight in the performance as more prominent local figures. I was

particularly struck by one woman's emotional comments: she was an African American woman, possibly somewhere between 40 and 50 years old, and expressed extreme gratitude to Anna Deavere Smith for coming to Austin and doing this performance, but also for dedicating her life to the kind of work she does. She ended by saying, "You're doing God's work."

The fact that the woman invoked God was jarring, but although I am not a believer I had to agree. I was encouraged that this woman seemed aware of the potential spiritual and ethical importance of this work and was unafraid to say it. This is a pervasive issue among artists and cultural critics of all stripes these days: the recognition of a need to get over the fear of voicing strong opinions about ideal concepts without naiveté if the money-and-power-obsessed peddlers of late capitalism are to ever be questioned. I bring up this story in part because my own work is indebted to Deavere Smith's, but also because it illustrates the infectious spiritual and physical possibility live performers have to make audience members experience love and grace and compassion and intelligence, to carry them along and transform them. Anna Deavere Smith's presence is important and powerful, and she makes every effort to allow people to participate in, benefit from, and share that power. My argument is that all actors should be made fully aware that they can possess this power, and in acknowledging it should be encouraged to use it responsibly.

Actors and Stars

While electronic media can be exciting and important tools of democracy, in some ways the disempowerment of actors arises out of the predominance of film and

television as vehicles for culture. Like almost all public figures, actors in general have become conflated with Hollywood stars, and are frequently thought of as disembodied images to be looked at, consumed, and sometimes worshipped unreflectively. For audiences interested in critical thinking, it is difficult to take any artist seriously (particularly those directly connected with commercial media) after postmodernism, in an environment where capitalism subsumes all attempts at resistance. Commodification, in so many different ways, diminishes the ability of artists to encourage social engagement and change. Examining how stars are constructed as media images reveals how single identities can become commodities, but at the same time it illuminates the process of building a character in potentially useful ways.

The construction of stars specifically relies on the consideration of bodies as images and capital: it is not only the focus on specific qualities and values represented by a star's image, but also obscuring the body's labor and making the identity seamless and believable that determines star power. Paul McDonald writes,

> Star images are collections of meanings read from various star texts. … Unlike other performers, stars have greater power in the industry because of their dual capacity as labour and capital. The star becomes a form of capital inasmuch as his or her image can be used to create advantage in the market for films and secure profits.

> Because the image is not the person but rather a set of texts and meanings that signify the person, then the image is something separable from the star. (14)

The disembodiment that is required to sell stars as capital also makes it possible to promote the impression that a complex, multiple and changing personality is fixed and unified. Dyer invokes Lana Turner as a star who embodied the contradictions of 1950s femininity to illustrate how the illusion of unity is particularly significant with regards to gender representation:

> …if it is true to say that American society has seen sexuality, especially for women, as wrong, and, in effect "extraordinary," and yet has required women to be both sexy and pure and ordinary, then one can see Lana Turner's combination of sexuality and ordinariness, or Marilyn Monroe's blend of sexiness and innocence, as effecting a magical synthesis of these opposites. This was possible partly through the specific chains of meaning in the images of those two stars, and partly through, once again, the fact of their real existence as individuals in the world, so that the disunity created

> by attaching opposing qualities to their images was none the less rendered a unity simply by virtue of the fact that each was only one person. (26)

This synthesis is something that makes clear the danger and hegemony of star images and the infectious allure of presence: resistant and contradictory "outsider" practices are often obscured or swallowed up and made ineffectual by their inclusion in the "human" character of a star when he or she is packaged for consumption. But Lana Turner is particularly fascinating in the respect of the fabrication of image, because, as Dyer suggests, built into her image is the process of creation, in much the same way that drag performance exposes the performativity of gender. In "Four Films of Lana Turner," Dyer writes,

> In Turner's later films, the processes of manufacture—the production of the images—are increasingly evident until they become an integral part of the image. With most stars, the point is to disguise the manufacturing so that they simply appear to be what their image proclaims them to be; with Turner, part of the fascination is with the manufacture itself—with her, it is actually beguiling to see the strings being pulled. (187)

This is particularly evident in Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life*, which is a film about passing that contains numerous references to Turner's character Lora "acting" rather than actually "being" a proper mother.

My interest is in how actors can expose the mechanics of manufacture within their processes, and still convincingly embody contradictions in such a way that the unification of opposites is generous and emphasizes possibility rather than colonizing and eliminating one side or the other. As Anne Bogart writes, "In a time when computers, television, film and mega malls dominate and mediate our relationship with others, perhaps the theater is a place to strengthen and heighten our direct connection with each other" (www.siti.org/#). How does transferring the theories of star studies to live and community-based theatre, where the presence of an actual body interacting with audience members affect an actor's "presence?" How might the interactive relationship between the actor and the community complicate the idea of the actor/star as individual identity? What happens if the same kind of intertextuality that goes into the development of star images is demystified and deliberately used when a live body is actually present? What might be the advantage of emphasizing the presence of the live body of an individual actor *without* an interest only in image or financial gain, but *with* a focus on the interaction of an actual person with all of the texts—including real human conversations, experiences and behaviors—used to create a character? How might grappling with the differences between "acting," "doing" and "being" through an actor's process be an important contemporary practice?

Training actors to be citizens and scholars

Training plays a pivotal role in encouraging actors to embrace the privilege and responsibility of their roles as significant public intellectuals, and in changing the way the public in general imagines actors' role in the world. The 2005 annual training issue of

American Theatre includes a panel discussion entitled "How Does Your Garden Grow: Conversations With 6 Actors Who Teach." The moderator of the panel, David Byron, introduces the conversation by pointing out that in the United States, drama departments at universities are typically granted less financial support and have fewer tenured professors than other departments, and connects this problem to the way actors are viewed in this country: "We deify them (endless awards programs) or we dismiss them (especially when they speak up during an election season), but we haven't yet seemed to find a niche for them outside the pages of *Entertainment Weekly*" (34). Byron points out that even in England, where actors are thought to be more well respected, Richard Eyre and Nicholas Wright mention actors very little in their history of contemporary theatre, *Changing Stages*, and "in the process they not only marginalize actors' role in the social order, but erase them even from theatre history" (34). This marginalization and mistrust is really nothing new: it has persisted throughout the history of actors and acting. Joseph Roach reveals that Diderot, in writing *Le Paradoxe sur le Comedien*, became somewhat of an apologist for the profession as he "traced the psychology of the actor to its source in historic persecution and ostracism, the ill-consequence of corrupting nurture if not nature: like heretics, actors were routinely excommunicated by a church that readily forgave rapists and fratricides. The heretic may recant, the murderer repent, but actors have nothing to renounce but their livelihood" (137). Unless they are successful commercial celebrities, people who choose to make their living as actors must learn to cope with being dismissed and disrespected.

While finding the origin of this fear, misunderstanding, and disempowerment is quite complicated, it is fairly clear how it gets perpetuated. Three quarters of the way through his panel discussion, Byron poses a question to the group of actor/teachers that I believe is incredibly important in assessing the state of actor training programs. He asks, "Is the actor a proactive, creative force, not only on the stage, but in society as a whole?" (37). The panelists' responses are telling. Marian Seldes begins the discussion by saying that she doesn't "see the actor as a person who can influence and make a change. We are absolutely the servants of the writer" (37). Floyd King echoes her sentiment: "We're the interpreters. It's not *our* words, it's not *our* thoughts, it's not *our* principles that we put up there on the stage. It's the playwright's. If we're doing our job right, that's what we're serving. If anyone's going to change the world, it's going to be a playwright" (38). Seldes and King's ideas not only beg the question "How is it possible that interpretation is *not* significant, and how can it not reflect an actor's thoughts or principles?" but also make me wonder how and why they came to this conclusion and feel the need to downplay the actor's creative role to their students. Why does it seem virtuous, even necessary, for actors to be at someone else's service?

In response to Gary Sinise's opinion that "In the scheme of things, you know, there are more important things than acting," F. Murray Abraham (who, incidentally, has identified himself earlier in the conversation as coming from a working class background, and stated that an acting teacher on the Texas-Mexico border "saved his life") pipes in with, "It's the most important thing in the world!" He continues, "I think acting is definitely subversive. There's an anarchic quality to acting that people envy and lash out

at. Actors represent a danger to society." Fiona Shaw, who was trained and works in England, gives the response, "I don't think that good acting is polemical, but I do think that the choices the actor makes are, of course, political." Part of my goal in pursuing this research is to reveal that actors can and do have a significant societal influence, but that they are taught to think of themselves as powerless to ease their transition into a commercial market where they need to find work and survive as professional actors. The idea that actors are not real artists is not "common sense," but presenting it as such serves to support the system of production and consumption as it currently exists in the United States.

It seems possible that anxiety over what actors are capable of doing is at root of the systemic tendency to minimize their power and encourages them ignore their role as philosophers and their ability to effect change. As Byron's observations point out, despite confusion in the contemporary United States about what their social function is, actors are "deified": they are a source of great fascination, adoration and desire, and hold enormous power over the public imagination. Richard Bauman, in *Verbal Arts as Performance*, describes the strong presence of live performers, the thing that gives them the "subversive" and "anarchic" quality of which F. Murray Abraham speaks:

> The consideration of the power inherent in performance to transform social structures opens the way to a range of additional considerations concerning the role of the performer in society. Perhaps there is a key here to the persistently documented tendency for performers to be both admired and feared—admired for their artistic skill and power and for the

> enhancement of experience they provide, feared because of the potential they represent for subverting and transforming the status quo. Here too may lie a reason for the equally persistent association between performers and marginality or deviance, for in the special emergent quality of performance the capacity for change may be highlighted and made manifest to the community. (qtd. in Dolan *Utopia* 1)

My work arose out of a desire to focus on and harness that "emergent quality" that actors possess in rehearsal and performance, the power that is often minimized in training and might account for some of the mistrust and marginalization of the labor of acting. As I see it, the work that actors do always combines, to one degree or another, physical reality with imaginative possibility, and they always embody the kind of praxis that makes change possible. They work dialectically, in conversation with history, fellow theatre artists, and audiences; and the product of their labor is embodied and active—they are engaged in the project of creating worlds and living in them. Actors, while preparing for a role and performing on stage, actually *are* what Jill Dolan refers to as "utopian performatives" – they "represent … an imaginative construction of both thought and action, of both everyday life and theatrical performance" (*Modern Drama* 165).

In order encourage actors to make use of their power as creative agents, it is essential that teachers expose actors who are in training to the opinions of the latter two actor/teachers cited in the panel above. Students should be encouraged to believe that their work is indeed "the most important thing in the world," and that they share the responsibility of making meaning and the exciting possibility of changing people's

understandings of how they live in the world with writers, directors and audiences alike. One of the main issues this dissertation addresses is *how* to teach actors to recognize the power they can possess in this culture, and to imagine how they might responsibly work together with audiences in their communities to use that power to achieve change.

Resisting the Commodification of Training

The first step toward the empowerment of actors in training involves historicizing the social and economic processes that led to the current state of theatre education, and assessing what steps might be taken at this historical juncture to publicly awaken the idea of actors as well-respected artists and activists. In the introduction to the anthology *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, Alison Hodge calls actor training—which has, in Europe and North America, developed mainly in the twentieth century—"arguably the most important development in modern Western theatre making," and points to the fact that "many of the innovators in this field have been responsible for both unique training techniques and for some of the landmark theatre productions of the twentieth century" as evidence that the acting process is central to the understanding of theatre and its meanings (1). The fact that theories and practices of acting were of central interest to many innovative theatre artists over the past century—Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Brecht, Grotowski, Strasberg, Adler, Bogart, etc.—does seem to point to the significance of actors' processes in the form and perceived meanings of theatrical production.

Hodge attributes the development of actor training to several factors: a new awareness of and interest in codified Asian training traditions and intercultural exchange in general; the Enlightenment focus on science and rationality that led to attempts to

search for "absolute, objective languages of acting that could offer models, systems and tested techniques to further the craft;" the creation of the role of theatre "director" at the turn of the century; and to responses to Diderot's *Le Paradoxe sur le Comedien*, published in 1830 (3). One might add to this list of socio-historical causes many others: the development of Freudian psychology and responses to it, the industrialization and mechanization of the European economy, and the spread of capitalism being among the most significant. As *Twentieth Century Actor Training* makes evident, the responses to all of these historical factors among theatre practitioners and acting teachers have been varied and contradictory; each has had a different theory of how the actor should relate to the text, the interaction between the individual actor, the theatrical ensemble, and the audience, the shape and function of the body in performance, and the concept of character.

Finding these objective languages and defining sets of tools, while it made certain principles about acting transmissible to students and democratized the craft, also happened in a climate in which capitalism was beginning its development into the world's predominant economic system. Reifying "acting" made it possible to turn the craft into a commodity, and over the years countless acting teachers have capitalized on people's dreams of acting professionally through selling workshops, classes, books and instructional videos. Scanning the theatre section of the library for books about acting and actors now, at the beginning of the 21st century, one finds a wealth of material that is extremely difficult to navigate: there are numerous books about "*the* craft of acting," most of which claim to have found the most direct and accessible route to creating a

character on stage or on camera. Acting is often presented as one "craft" or "art" to be mastered despite the obvious existence of so many different approaches; there are also instructional manuals on how to effectively sell oneself at an audition or deal with "the business of acting;" there are biographies of actors with long careers in "show business." Despite efforts to the contrary, especially in the United States, actor training has not only changed to feed a system that prioritizes profit, it has itself become a vast industry in which particular schools or teachers must sell themselves to potential students. As a result, in many contexts actor training has become a standardized, simplified, and marketable item—it must be seen as a product rather than a process, a series of interactions, or an ongoing conversation about certain artistic and philosophic problems.

Far fewer on the library shelves, but in increasing numbers over the last couple of decades, are books and anthologies devoted to the analysis and criticism of actors' training and processes by scholars who are attempting to decommodify the art of acting and restore its intellectual and critical function. In his introduction to *Acting (Re)Considered*, Phillip Zarrilli recognizes the problem addressed above, and points out that "Many discourses about acting assume that they are expressing *the* truth. Most narratives foreground neither the process of constructing this 'truth' nor the voice or specific position from which this (version of) 'truth' is being constructed" (8). Citing George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Zarrilli calls for a recognition of the fact that "*all* languages of acting are highly metaphorical" (10). He suggests "we can celebrate the freedom of not having to find a 'universal' language once and for all. Rather we can spend our energy on the continuing challenge of searching for languages of acting which

best allow one to actualize a particular paradigm of performance in a particular context for a particular purpose" (16). Zarrilli points to a significant problem for acting pedagogy in the United States, and his criticism is essential to my project and its search for ways to restore the power of actors as creative and productive artists. However, Zarrilli is himself also speaking from a particular historical perspective. The book was published in 1995, in the middle of a postmodern academic, social and economic context that called for a critical examination of truth claims and an interest in relativism and historicity. *Acting (Re) Considered* reflects a desire to resist the logic of dominant ideals that claim an objective truth that is, in reality, historically determined by those with power and money.

Zarrilli's work in this particular anthology, and other scholarship that is dedicated to analysis based on critical theory, often contends that "truth" is relative to one's specific, identity-based cultural experience. That experience, in turn, has been determined by the historic and economic circumstances in which one has been placed. Anything that claims access to that which is "human" is typically understood as having been constructed from a white, male, Christian, and heterosexual perspective, making it necessary to give voice to individual experience that contradicts what are presented as "universal" ideals. Consequently, traditional actor training has been viewed with suspicion by scholars interested in resisting dominant ideology, not only because of its apparent association with capitalist goals, but because of its continued claims to give actors the ability to represent honest reality. However, for artists and students coming to consciousness in the environment of a post-September 11 United States, the current war in Iraq, and the administration of George W. Bush, there is a pervasive interest among

artists, activists and intellectuals in the strength and power of making claims to truth. It seems vital that people discover commonality, empathy and identification without giving in to the idea that everyone is the same, maintain interest in individual civil liberties, and embrace the deliberate action and change that a certain kind of unity makes possible. While there is a continued need for critical thinking of the kind that permeated academia in the 1990s, it seems that the humanist impulses of Stanislavski-based training might once again prove useful and relevant to actors.

This project proposes an approach to educating actors that interrogates the prioritization of unified, stable and internally focused identities within traditional actor training, and at the same time takes up the current need to reexamine the power inherent in making strong statements about love, empathy, truth, commonality and possibility. I am inspired by Jill Dolan's call for activists to embrace what she imagines as a "reconstructed humanism," that is "multiple, respecting the complexities and ambiguities of identity while it works out ways for people to share and feel things in common, like the need for survival and for love, for compassion and for hope" (22). What changes can be made in actor training programs that reflect the current cultural and intellectual climate, in which a longing for ideas like beauty and spirituality is slowly being acknowledged despite a persistent sense of powerlessness, cynicism and alienation? In training, how can actors be encouraged to understand that they can and do possess immense power, and to make connections with people in their own communities to channel their powerful presences in a way that helps those communities reclaim a sense of hope and possibility?

I describe a process for training and rehearsal that consciously incorporates "traditional" American Stanislavski-based approaches that are the staples of BFA and MFA programs and other acting schools with oral history and ethnographic interviewing, solo performance, dramaturgical research and documentary techniques that are currently the terrain of anthropology, performance studies, theatre history and media studies programs. I am suggesting a way to continue exploring the powerful possibilities of feeling, empathy and identification and locate commonalities, connections and truths that are based in human bodies, but with a full awareness of critical theory that describes how bodies, feelings, thought and expression are shaped by history and culture. This technique is an attempt to get beyond what Dolan terms the "cynicism of late global capitalism" (30) by examining how acting, seen as a physical dialogue between members of a community, can be a source of hope and transformation for both actors and their audiences.

Artists Performing Community

This process has been influenced and inspired not only by work on the plays about which I have written directly, but also by my experience as an audience member and an interest in community-based arts in general. For example, Anne Bogart and the SITI Company, from whom I learned Viewpoints and Composition techniques, engaged in a community-based audience project at Actors Theatre of Louisville while preparing for a production of Noel Coward's *Private Lives* that resulted in the creation of their performance called *Cabin Pressure*. I saw both productions at ATL in 2000. The process involved a direct engagement of the context of actor/audience relationships. Bogart writes in her directors notes for the ensemble performance composition:

> What is an audience? What is the creative role of the audience? What is the responsibility of the audience to the actor? What is an actor? What is the actor's responsibility to the audience? These are some of the questions that I posed to the SITI Company actors in rehearsal for Cabin Pressure. I wanted us to start with no preconceived notions or assumptions about the answers to these questions, but rather to experiment freely and play with possible variations on the theme. The result of these explorations is a production that speaks directly to the people in the room sharing it." (www.siti.org)

She also writes that the text for *Cabin Pressure* pieced together writings from theatre theorists such as Stanislavski, Meyerhold and Artaud, "as well as selections from my interviews with fifty seven theater-goers and fragments from existing plays that suggest

variations on the actor/audience theme" (www.siti.org). I share with Anne Bogart and the SITI Company an interest in the possibility that bringing larger communities into rehearsal and preparation might address the problem that theatrical production often mystifies the processes of creation and erases complexity and contradiction; and that the choices made outside of performance can be based on conversation, modeling how the "taste" of an actor, playwright or director is formed through social interaction.

There are a number of other important artists dedicated to questions of community and identity whose work, while I have not written about it directly in the dissertation, has inspired and infused my own projects as an actor, director, teacher and scholar. Naomi Wallace is one, and I discuss my indebtedness to her play *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek* in the conclusion. Another of my many heroes is community-based artist Harrell Fletcher, whose 1997 collaboration with John Rubin called *Some People From Around Here* involved a series of 8' x 8' portraits on plywood along Interstate Highway 80 in Fairfield, California that were billboard-like paintings of people who lived in the local community. People driving by on their way to other places might not normally consider that this town is actually made up of human beings: the billboards forced drivers who are used to rapidly moving from one place to the next to pause and consider *who* was surrounding them. At the same time, this project used a medium—the billboard—that is usually dedicated only to selling things to remind viewers that people are more important than products. It might have the effect of allowing people to notice and think critically about the medium itself. It also made "regular" local people take their place aside celebrities or other images that might typically grace these signs that pervade both urban and rural

landscapes across the United States. Fletcher said in a recent interview, "If you look at my work in an overall view, which is the one that I like to see, then you see James Joyce in relationship to Star Trek, in relationship to rugs, in relationship to plants, or whatever it happens to be. James Joyce is not being valued more than these other people and subjects. He's being valued, because I think he's interesting, but so are all of these other things" (http://homepage.mac.com/allanmcnyc/harrellfletcher/mccollum_interview.html). The process I describe is an attempt to democratize the individual identities of actors and characters in the way Fletcher's work promotes equality. The intent is not to *devalue* actors and make their presences less charged or powerful, but to elevate all people's stature by pointing out that they are equal in importance to actors or stars.

In addition to being inspired by Fletcher's community-based and media-conscious strategies, I took the concept of democratizing the individual from Adrienne Kennedy. Her self-described "autobiographical" collage-like plays such as *Funnyhouse of a Negro* and *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* suggest that individual identity is comprised of many different books, films, photographs, music, and (most importantly) experiences and other people, and inspired Elin Diamond's essay theorizing identity as a "history of identifications." Diamond writes that, "Realism as literature and as mode of production urged and satisfied the pursuit of knowledge, the production of truth" (5); but that in Kennedy's plays, "The subject's identity is no more, or less, than the accumulated history of her identifications. Indeed 'identity' is the illusory stable representation of that turbulent history and no less powerful (in fact far more powerful) for being imaginary" (111). Kennedy's book *People Who Led to My Plays* is an autobiography, but not of the

usual sort. It is composed of short snippets of all kinds of memory – descriptions of people and the thoughts Kennedy had or has about them, photographs, lists of belongings, loves and hates. The solo "character study" performances I describe, in which actors build an identity by performing a collection of multiple texts through their individual bodies, were modeled, both in theory and practice, after this gorgeous and important autobiographical work.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One is a genealogy of the larger network of historical, economic and intellectual influences on American actor training. Rather than arguing that an entirely new method of training should be invented to meet the needs of a new generation of actors, I try to illuminate how theories and practices of acting are part of an ongoing dialectic and intellectual process. I begin by questioning why the primary "traditional" methods of training in the United States have been variations on Stanislavski's system. What historical factors led theatre programs to present the theoretical basis of Method acting and its variations as "common sense?" I argue that Stanislavski himself, as well as the American originators of the Method, were engaged in an important philosophic dialogue revolving around issues of history, community and individual identity, the "real" and imagination, subjective experience and objective fact, and human bodies and technology. With the expansion of unlimited growth capitalism, however, one side of each element of this discussion was privileged—the individual over the group, for example, or "the real" over imagination—and became reified as the "truth" of good

acting. At this juncture in the cultural history of the United States, it seems that actors are in a unique position to revive the important dialogue about those questions.

Chapter Two deals more specifically with the current division between professional actor training and performance studies in the climate of global capitalism. I point out that this rift reflects the conceptual framework promoting rigid boundaries and an "insider vs. outsider" mentality, about which Bruce McConachie has written in his book *American Theatre in the Culture of the Cold War: Producing and Contesting Containment*. I suggest that defining performance studies as a separate area of study, while it produced some valuable theoretical developments, also reinforced the metaphor of containment and the mentality that makes possible exclusionary practices. I propose that a deliberate and public collaboration between performance studies and professional actor training curricula might shift the metaphors by which we understand the acting process and restore actors' power as agents of transformation. Drawing on the work of Anna Deavere Smith, I describe how a process combining her community-based ethnographic performance techniques with more conventional, method-derived tools and other approaches to training might productively re-theorize individual identity as an ongoing and changing process that relies on embodied interactions with other people. In an effort to overcome the enmity between professional theatre and performance studies, I envision this process as one that weaves theories of embodied knowledge and critical pedagogy into actor training, and physicalizes questions about identity and community, "truth" and imagination, subjectivity and objectivity and the body and technology. In a sense, I am applying what cognitive theorists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson call an

"experientialist" approach, which satisfies both the subjectivist and objectivist viewpoints, to acting.

Chapters Three and Four are more specific still, describing two case studies in which colleagues and I began experimenting with this approach in the production of particular plays. The theories of how people live in the world explored by actors often originate as responses practical issues presented by particular plays and/or production contexts. Stanislavski's ideas famously started percolating when he was struggling to find solutions to difficulties he faced while rehearsing a role in Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*. Many of the forms used in Tadashi Suzuki's physical method of training began as exercises to capture the particular qualities of characters in *The Trojan Women* and other plays. The theories presented in my dissertation were begun, in part, during my own work on two projects: directing Charles Mee's *The Trojan Women: A Love Story* at the University of Texas in the fall semester of 2003 and performing the role of Ava Coo in a Lab Theatre production of Phyllis Nagy's *The Strip* at UT in spring 2004.

The chapter on Mee's play suggests how this approach reflects his playwriting style, and in doing so replaces the framework around acting that uses the particularly capitalist metaphors of conflict, conquest, and property with one that emphasizes dialogue, interaction and transformation. I use as a starting point Fredric Jameson's question about the possibility of resistance to capitalism in postmodern art— "We have seen that there is a way in which postmodernism replicates or reproduces—reinforces—the logic of consumer capitalism; the more significant question is whether there is also a way in which it resists that logic" (1974). I propose that Charles Mee's *The Trojan*

Women: A Love Story, when peopled with human bodies in theatrical production, offers a Marxian and "reanimated humanist" form that responds to the cynicism of postmodern American culture: it represents embodied subjects in conversation with pieces of all kinds of history, moving objects around and being moved (emotionally, consciously, and physically) by them to shape a new world. Through a close reading of the play combined with the historical context of the war in Iraq, descriptions of our production choices, and the performance texts student actors created in rehearsal, I theorize our process as a reconciliation of performance and theatre curricula.

Chapter Four is specifically about the potential of this process as a means of gender critique. It combines a close reading of Phyllis Nagy's *The Strip*, a description of the solo performance I conceived based on interviews with people whose experiences coincided with those of my character, Ava Coo, and Judith Butler's theories about the performativity of gender and drag as a subversive act. I argue that, as Nagy's play and Ava Coo's journey make clear, queer performances of gender also have the ability to emphasize how the body, while its adherence to normative rules is undoubtedly required in certain ways for work, is often compelled to abandon those rules and "choose" how it shapes itself according to what is pleasurable, comfortable and sometimes joyful. Using the interviews I conducted with drag performers, I show how their own processes of creating "women" characters is a theatricalized version of how identity is truly formed – they take on their bodies the characteristics of multiple (real and imaginary) women with whom they have had contact over the years in order to change their own (male) bodies into representations of femininity. Finally, I argue that "queering" is not really an

"outsider" practice but a humanizing process, and that the construction of national identity based on dominant ideology is, in fact, highly theatrical. This inversion of the association of "the real" with masculinity and productive action and the "theatrical" with queerness is an attempt to reconcile what Stephen Bottoms calls the homophobic distinction between efficacious performance and theatrical entertainment.

I conclude with the hopeful possibility that the metaphors through which people conceive actors' purpose in local communities across the globe can be transformed through the gradual introduction of changes in the curricula of theatre and performance studies departments. These changes should combine the important work that has already been done in each separate field to create something new and relevant to contemporary actors and audiences—a process that involves the great pleasure of embodied conversations and is local and global, factual and imaginative, intellectual and physical, frustrating and fun. Implementing these changes will, without a doubt, pose a great challenge. To be honest, some of my students are resistant to this work because the process of conducting interviews and listening closely enough to people to be able to imitate their responses requires more focus and energy than some of them expected to devote to an acting class. Part of their reluctance also comes from the fact that this is a slippery, imperfect and uncertain process that can never really be mastered. But, like any worthwhile partnership, choosing to engage with acting requires commitment and dedication. To enter into this relationship means understanding that the recently re-cobbled street is bumpy and the ride will be rough—one has to be willing to fail sometimes, to feel lost, to not understand what is going on or where the path is leading.

But I am certain that weathering these difficulties is worth it: that the deep understanding and transformation and sense of community and great joy that can result from this process will equal and eventually outweigh the pains involved in this labor of love.

Chapter One
An Intellectual Genealogy of Professional Actor Training in the United States

> *[The American actor is] dedicated, one: to himself; and then: he's dedicated, because of that, to the personality that sells. … his success depends on that. Then he's dedicated to what he gets out of the money that they give him because he sells; he's dedicated to his family, which is nice; to his swimming pool … and he becomes more and more … dedicated to himself and his property. Now, that is impossible in another environment.*
>
> *This is a transitional stage for us in America. The theatre has been a victim of many things—mechanization, the success motive—and now it's coming of age. We also are going to have to … be nationally understood as representing America, American ideas. We're going to have to … state those ideas, not only in terms (and we excel in those terms) of making the world laugh. But also making the world think. The American actor is going to have to make sacrifices for that. … If not, we are going to be individually successful and not successful as a national cultural symbol. And I hope … I hope we will.*
>
> - *Stella Adler, from a 1964 television interview "Stella Adler and the Actor."*

Acting is a process of labor: it involves the movement of actors' bodies and the exertion of energy and effort with some goal in mind. Significantly, while (or, I would

contend, *because*) it relies on embodiment, actors' work is also intellectual labor, and theorists who have investigated the theories and practices of acting throughout the centuries have always undertaken important philosophical, social and ethical questions about the way ideas, feelings, culture and human identity manifest themselves in and through the body. In a capitalist economy, however, whatever actors' physical and intellectual labor generates—a form of embodied human identity, feeling and behavior, a model for creating community, an interpretation of a play, a philosophy of life, a method of working—is at risk of becoming a commodified abstraction that is detached from its connection to movement and bodies so that it can be exchanged in the marketplace. Particularly in the 21st-century United States, the process of commodifying acting has resulted in the reification of only certain aspects of Stanislavski-based training as the accepted craft for actors to master, and also in the legitimation of professionalism and its marriage to what Stella Adler calls the "profit motive." This association between legitimate acting and money has been facilitated by the American tendency to prioritize the individual over the group and an anti-intellectual bent that values action without reflection.

In this chapter, I historicize the development of actor training in the United States in an effort to decommodify it and reveal its intellectual and revolutionary potential. I begin by interrogating the idea that Stanislavski is the individual most responsible for the craft of acting. While it is clear that attaching his name to acting has made possible the transmission and investigation of some important ideas, the association of his work with commercial media has also obscured his role as a significant intellectual. I place his work

with The Moscow Art Theatre in the context of intellectual debates about representing the real through an imagined form in the interest of social change: debates in which philosophers like Diderot and Marx were among the most important participants. While Stanislavski-based actor training is often associated with humanism, and humanism has been criticized in contemporary thought in part because it serves to naturalize dominant ideology, I remind readers that Stanislavski's Enlightenment influences made possible the overthrow of the old aristocratic order, and his early conversants in the United States, The Group Theatre, had deliberate revolutionary and anti-aristocratic goals: their interest was in populism and democracy. I also want to show how the increased reliance on capitalist goals of individual property and privilege has obscured the democratizing potential of actor training, and that the reification of "The Method" as a solid and unified "craft" has been furthered by the institutional division between practical or utilitarian theatre production programs and intellectual academic areas. My goal in representing actor training as a moving, changing, community-based and historical intellectual process is to begin to break down the solid walls that maintain this separation.

Actors, Agency and Intellectualism

In the 2005 edition of the annual issue of *American Theatre* devoted to actor training, Robert Brustein writes that as soon as "an actor starts thinking of the profession as 'the business,' then it is inevitable that he or she will be more preoccupied with material rewards than with artistic satisfactions. Most people don't have that choice. Most professions are oriented either towards service or towards profit. In acting, the options are blurred" (124). In the article, the issues Brustein brings up highlight a significant

dilemma facing actors in the United States who seek training. Many BFA and MFA programs now call themselves "professional actor training programs," and actors intending to immerse themselves in "the business" of acting choose these, while performance studies programs have developed to encourage the ongoing academic study of performance in realms mostly other than professional theatre. This is not to suggest that the investigations actors undertake over the course of their studies in professionally-oriented programs are not intellectual or scholarly in nature. As I emphasized in the preface, I contend that exactly the opposite is the case. Among the important elements of an actor's process listed on the website for the graduate acting program at Tisch School of the Arts, for example, is a question central to metaphysics and philosophy: "What's the difference between 'representing' and 'being'?" (http://gradacting.tisch.nyu.edu/object/ga_training.html).

Because their work involves a fully embodied examination of questions about existence like this one, actors are among the most important and powerful philosophers and activists a culture might produce. However, because it is taken as common sense in the contemporary United States that financial profit is *the* most important mark of success and source of security and happiness, the power actors might have to effect change is diminished by the seemingly inevitable commodification of their craft. When motives of individual profit are placed at the forefront of an actor's work, grappling with complicated, in-depth and often contradictory questions of morality and ethics, social relationships and responsibility, memory and possibility takes a back seat to more practical and unfortunately reductive questions like "To what kinds of roles am I

naturally best suited, and how can the audition material I choose play up those characteristics?" or "How can I showcase my most sellable features in the most clear and direct way?"

During my PhD coursework in the Performance as Public Practice program at the University of Texas at Austin, I took a graduate acting course that was designed for "non-acting majors." The professor of the course titled it "I JUST WANT TO ACT (But, thank God I'm not an actor!)" (Syllabus 1), the implication being that while those of us taking the course may have an intense interest in acting (we were PhD students, MFA in Drama and Theatre for Youth students, and MFA playwrights), we were not on the uncertain and often quite taxing career path to becoming actors in the professional sense. While many of us had been practicing actors in the past, the title of the course separated our identities from the activities we were pursuing in this particular course and from any non-professional acting we might have done: only those who were on the *professional* track were actors in the official sense. I don't mean to suggest, here, that the instructor of this course was intentionally stating that our work in this class or elsewhere was insignificant, nor that the MFA acting students were interested only in the business aspects of acting and theatre. In fact, the course was useful, pleasurable and engaging, and the professor's insightful feedback on students' work revealed her own strong expertise as a performer and teacher and dedication to larger questions of interpretation; the title of the syllabus was almost certainly intended in fun and not meant to be scrutinized so closely. But it illustrates very clearly how we were interpellated into the profit-driven ideological framework that is pervasive in the United States. Because of the structure of our theatre

department, if those of us who were not in the MFA program wanted to take an acting class at all, we could only enroll in this one; we ended up inadvertently reinforcing the ideology of professionalism vs. scholarship (or practice vs. theory, action vs. thought, body vs. mind, etc.) by agreeing that we were "non-actors" (and, conversely, that the MFA actors were not equally scholars, playwrights or teachers).

In general, in the contemporary United States, the course of study actors undertake in MFA and BFA programs often underscores the idea that the ability to investigate important questions about the world and how people inhabit it is less significant to the current definition of an actor than the ability to sell oneself as a marketable commodity. For example, the website I cited above for the MFA acting program at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts states that during the first two years of study, the actors focus on developing a methodology for approaching scenes: "In these classes, through the work of a wide range of playwrights, you are guided to an understanding of process: What does going moment-to-moment mean? What really is listening? How does an actor play an intention? What's the difference between 'representing' and 'being'?" This ongoing intellectual investigation shifts, at some point, to address necessary business-related issues: "Important classes as you near graduation prepare you to function confidently in the professional world—taking charge of business affairs and learning how to audition as well as your many options in the world of theatre, film and television" (http://gradacting.tisch.nyu.edu/object/ga_training.html). With the introduction of commercial concerns, the training's purpose switches from an investigative process to the creation of a sellable product.

This emphasis on what Stella Adler called "the success motive" sets certain parameters for what kinds of questions actors might ask about the process they are studying. The need for actors to market themselves requires that they settle on a particular, objective set of tools: "the" art of acting. That art, in this country, most frequently makes use of language derived from Stanislavski-based techniques—the concepts of "playing an intention" or achieving "moment-to-moment" behavior, cited above, are among the basic tenets of American adaptations of his System. According to the website for the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, "The ability to sustain truthful behavior in imaginary circumstances is the very heart and soul of Academy study" (http://www.aada.org/html/curriculum/fulltime.html), and The Actors Studio Drama School, when it was part of The New School University from 1995-2005, stated that its goal was "to produce theatre artists who have access to emotional truth and moment-to-moment reality while maintaining a sense of stage-craft and professionalism" (http://www.newschool.edu/academic/drama/acting.aspx?s=1:1) . While these programs do introduce students to a wide range of tools and techniques—clowning, Viewpoints and Suzuki training, Alexander technique, yoga, etc.—the playing of "truth" on stage using some derivation of Stanislavski's work is almost always taught as being foundational and applicable to any project: it is the one thing student actors are expected to master in order to have professional careers. Furthermore, the universal applicability of this theory of acting has taken on the appearance of being inevitable and natural: it seems that determining objectives, obstacles and actions to achieve believable performances in the

given circumstances set out by a playwright has always and inevitably been the cornerstone of the actor's craft.

The rules derived from Stanislavski-based training are, however, historical and coincide with the post-Enlightenment interest in applying principles of logic, reason and analysis to most human activities. In acting, like in other disciplines, the process of revealing *human* responsibility for maintaining and living in the world was accompanied by the question of how to find the truth and the structure once supplied by metaphysical forces. The conception of acting as a craft with its own set of observable and usable principles brought the inspiration and basis for actors' labor "down to earth" and made the source of their behavior "regular" human beings rather than the spirit of the gods or the manners and tastes of monarchs. Consequently, it became difficult to determine who decided how actors would move and shape their bodies. Especially after acting became a professional endeavor beholden both to artistic standards and the demands of commerce, it was hard to tell who had agency in determining actors' habits and actions. Was it a playwright? A director? And where did *they* look for ideas of how people should behave? To their audiences? But who or what shaped the way people in the audience live their lives and understand theatre?

For example, I currently teach a survey course called "Theatre History from 1642 to the Present," and early in the class we discuss Aphra Behn's *The Rover* and Restoration comedy in general. The text for the course is an anthology of plays edited by some of the professors at the University where I teach, *The Longman Anthology of Theatre and Drama.* The supporting material for *The Rover* includes a section on the

conventions of Restoration theatre, in which the authors are careful to draw correlations between the permissive morality, posturing, deception and wit characteristic of the court of Charles II and Restoration plays, and state that "In the late seventeenth century such things as 'making a leg' or talking in 'the language of the fan' were not the performance conventions they are today; rather, they were part of the social world the plays mirrored" (676). In other words, the manipulative and licentious style of Restoration actors may seem antiquated, false and contrived to contemporary audiences, but in Restoration England it reflected, commented on and reinforced the tastes of the aristocrats for whom the actors (also members of court) were performing. Certainly the relationship of Restoration audiences to actors is a rich arena for speculation and debate, but it seems clear that even when they were satirizing the behavior of the cavaliers, actors served as purveyors of aristocratic taste and habit. Rather than actively choosing how they would perform a certain kind of personality or a particular action, or delving into the complex history and psychology of an individual character to make that choice, the source of their behavior resided in the tastes and fancies of the monarch and the court.

A few centuries later, it would be difficult to argue that Marlon Brando's famed understated and deliberately extra-authentic "mumble and scratch" brand of acting had no effect on the way men enacted their gender, or that many people did not study Marilyn Monroe's excessive performances of femininity to learn how an ideal woman was supposed to act. Brustein writes that actors not only *reflect* the way people behave in a particular time,

> Some actors even have the potential to *change* the style of an entire period; this was quintessentially true not only of the young Brando, but also of the young James Dean, and today, to a lesser extent, of Tom Cruise, Sean Penn and Johnny Depp. When Christopher Walken played Caligula at Yale in the early 1970s, scores of undergraduates in New Haven began imitating his loping walk, his eccentric speech, even the clothes he wore. (46 [emphasis mine])

But unlike in the court of Charles II where the link between actors' behavior and the King's taste was direct, it is hard to say who, exactly, was responsible for coming up with the standards for actors' behavior in contemporary films, and even trickier to determine to what degree Brando and Monroe (both schooled in Method techniques) had a hand in forming their own personae.

More involved still is the question of how their training, which encouraged them to be as believable in their characterizations as possible, led them to act in their roles in specific ways; and why the elements of believability and authenticity were the aspects of Method training that became priorities, while The Group Theatre and others who studied Stanislavski also championed revolutionary values such as ensemble playing. While teaching actors how to control their own bodies in training and rehearsal could ostensibly give them more power over the knowledge, ideas and tastes being represented, who ultimately judged how successful they were in using the tools correctly? Again, when they started to be beholden to paying audiences, the class of people who came to see their performances assessed actors' work, as did theatre critics, directors, playwrights and

other artists. If no single one of these opinions, or the actor's alone, could result in changing what elements of training he or she prioritized in creating a character, the answer might be found in how the actors, critics, directors and playwrights interact and under the pressure of what kinds of historical circumstances.

Questions about how to best understand the source of how people behave in the world and who is responsible for that behavior have been at the center of intellectual debates for centuries. Scholars in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in particular, began to grapple with the social conduct of human beings as a science—Comte, for example, applied positivist scientific principles to the study of human social activity and termed this field sociology; Freud, of course, looked to psychology for the source of human behavior; Marx examined history, philosophy, and—most significantly—economics. In this chapter, I argue that actors and the people who train them have been equally important participants in this ongoing intellectual conversation about human behavior and agency, and because it involves specifics of reproducing how *bodies* behave, their work has resulted in significant changes in the way people understand desire, identity, relationships, community and imagination. At the same time, the role of actors as creative artists who make significant intellectual and social contributions has been obscured both by mistrust of the necessarily physical nature of their work and by the hegemonic processes of capitalism. Because of these pressures, only certain elements of one theory of training have come to be defined as "the" craft of acting, and making money the primary goal of mastering those elements of the craft. It is not the Stanislavski-based means of training and its particular approach to "truth" that disempowers actors,

however, but the commodification of acting programs themselves and the need for them to feed an increasingly commercial market. The general acceptance of financial profit as the ultimate goal of professional acting, and the consequent identification of certain principles of training as key to achieving that goal make it appear that actors are powerless to make different choices.

I suggest a shift in focus: instead looking at actor training programs primarily as products promising greater ease of entry into professional careers, the curricula should actively remind students that their training is part of a historic discussion of important philosophical and artistic questions about individual identity and responsibility to a group, truth and imagination, subjectivity and objectivity and technology and the human body. In this chapter and the next, by situating 21st-century, United States' actor training programs within a larger historical conversation and network of influences, I hope to illuminate how the influence of a capitalist economy has led to the belief that the elements of an actor's process which may make her or him more marketable – faithfulness to the wishes of a director or playwright, physical or cultural resemblance to particular types of characters, inwardly directed experience of emotion and individual psychology, etc. – should be prioritized in most situations. The need to privilege certain ways of solving actors' problems for commercial reasons limits their ability to look critically at the work they are doing and recognize the possibility that other approaches to the intellectual projects they are undertaking might produce more effective social criticisms and efficacious performances. Through bringing to light historical and economic factors that have commercialized training programs and forced actors to choose

either a professional path *or* one that is more socially engaged and focused on exploring intellectual and historical as well as personal and emotional questions, I hope to clarify what steps might be made in theatre training programs to "decommodify" performers' processes and their work and restore the transformative power of actors' labor.

Acting and dialectical materialism

The first step in reminding actors that their processes are significant beyond preparing them for the necessities of the commercial world is to clarify how their labor and even the training itself grew to be understood as commodities in the first place. In his essay "Historicizing the Relations of Theatrical Production," Bruce McConachie provides a model for examining how the relations of theatre practice within a particular economic context influence its means. McConachie cites Raymond Williams, who "enjoins critics and historians to shift their definition of a 'work of art' from an object to a practice. Rather than attempting to isolate the art object and, in Kantian fashion, separate out its inherent components, the historian should investigate the nature and conditions of its historical practice" (173). In an attempt to "decommodify" art, Williams tries to place the movement back into artistic practice by understanding it as an interaction between social beings in particular historical and economic circumstances. McConachie, then, calls for a history of theatre that involves "extensive empirical and theoretical investigations into the sociohistorical conditions necessary for the emergence of various kinds of theater, the relations between historical forms of theatrical expression and the dominant ideology of a historical period, and the functions of theater in reproducing, modifying, or contradicting hegemonic relations of production" (176). Keeping in mind McConachie's suggestion to

illuminate the ideological underpinnings of the conditions surrounding different elements of theatre, I hope to locate a problem not in specific and objectified practices of actor training, but in the meanings those practices take on when they are exchanged within a larger historical framework dominated by a particular system of production and consumption.

The project of decommodifying acting in Williams's terms requires a consideration not only of how theories and practices of actor training are an interactive part of the system of production and consumption and cultural practices of a particular time and place, but also how they are part of a dialectical network that reaches across historical periods and locations. In European and North American history, dialectical thinking was a significant outgrowth of the democratic, anti-aristocratic and anti-idealist impulses of modernism, and has been the basis for some of the most significant philosophical developments over the past century[1]; the work of several theorists and practitioners who have analyzed and adapted Marx's work to critique their own historical circumstances have provided the inspiration for this dissertation (among them Williams, Frederic Jamison, Judith Butler, Howard Zinn, Berthold Brecht, Anna Deveare Smith and Augusto Boal). In this chapter, I begin by examining some of the early impulses behind Marxism as a philosophy with two intentions in mind. My interpretation of Marx's own methods and goals is intended to further clarify the value of uncovering the process

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[1] I bracket the importance of dialectical thinking to African, Asian and Latin American philosophical and spiritual systems, here, because while the significantly longer history of such concepts in other cultural contexts is important in a global context, it is beyond the scope of this particular project.

through which the training of actors in the United States came to be understood as a commercial endeavor focused on individual gain. Its second purpose is to begin to undo that hegemonic process by highlighting how actors and acting teachers are in fact among the most significant scholars who have been engaged in ongoing dialectical and critical investigations of the very sort to which Marx himself was devoted.

Dialectics, as it is defined on the Marxists.org website,

> … is the method of reasoning which aims to understand things concretely in all their movement, change and interconnection, with their opposite and contradictory sides in unity. … for dialectics, things can be contradictory not just in appearance, but in essence. For formal thinking, light must be either a wave or a particle; but the truth turned out to be dialectical – light is both wave and particle. … We are aware of countless ways of understanding the world; each of which makes the claim to be the absolute truth, which leads us to think that, after all, "It's all relative!" For dialectics the truth is the whole picture, of which each view makes up more or less one-sided, partial aspects.
>
> (http://www.marxists.org/glossary/frame.htm)

The materialist understanding of how social relations determine consciousness and historical progression, on which much of my work on this project is based, was a result of the fact that Marx saw himself as one part of a dialogue with the intellectual trends that came before him. He had an early interest in "a ruthless criticism of everything existing," and his philosophy was based on a critical analysis of Hegel's idealism (Tucker *xxviii*).

He took his cue from Feuerbach, a 19th-Century German philosopher and member of the group of thinkers known as the "Young Hegelians," who argued in *The Essence of Christianity* that a "transformational criticism" of the Hegelian idea that human beings were ideal "spirit (or God) in the process of self-alienation and self-realization" yielded the truth that God is, in fact, human beings realizing themselves "via the detour of alienation in the sphere of religion." In other words, as Hegel saw it, God created humans as entities separate from himself … Others through whose behavior he could achieve self-knowledge (so in a sense, humans are the actors God puts in motion to understand his own identity). Feuerbach, on the other hand sees God as a being humans invented who shares some of their own qualities and to whom they can look to understand their lives, but who lives in a separate "spiritual" realm. Marx realized, via Feuerbach, that he could make use of the structure of Hegel's work by changing it from a philosophy that viewed human beings as the personification of spirit into one that viewed spiritual ideals as alienated thought processes through which people were attempting to order their lives (xxii-xxiii). His view that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" (Tucker 4) came out of his interpretation and use of Hegel's own dialectical methodology.

Because he understood history as a moving process of transformation, Marx's interest was not in discarding Hegel altogether. He writes,

> If Hegel had set out from real subjects as the bases of the state he would not have found it necessary to transform the state in a mystical fashion into a subject. "In its truth, however," says Hegel, "subjectivity exists only

> as *subject*, personality only as *person*." This too is a piece of mystification. Subjectivity is a characteristic of the subject, personality a characteristic of the person. Instead of conceiving them as predicates of their subjects, Hegel gives the predicates an independent existence and subsequently transforms them in a mystical fashion into their subjects. (*Contribution to the Critique*, 18)

Hegel's views on spirit, rationalism, the state, family, etc., were actually essential to the formation of Marx's own thinking, but he argued with the concept that, like subjectivity or personality, certain ideals such as the state, God, etc., existed outside of or prior to physical, social interactions.

The inversion of Hegel here is a philosophical concept common to the Enlightenment: rather than looking upward to an abstract, hierarchical source for the reason for their existence or the source of their behavior, people could find it in themselves. Personality was created by the person, not the other way around, and subjectivity created by subjects. But without the dialectical framework, the source of these qualities could still be found within each *individual* person. In fact, the humanism associated with modernity and capitalism is frequently understood to privilege the power of separate individual subjects. As Marx understood it, though, the transformation that resulted in a flip from a vertical plane to a horizontal one was relational: rather than an individual being in dialogue with God, *people* could find the source of their identities *in conversation with each other*. The key to revolution was removing the power from objectified ideals by revealing their roots in *social interaction*. And the dialectic extended

not only to the people in the same time and location, it also moved across history. Dialectical materialism, in my reading, implies that Marx and Hegel should be read together, in dialogue with each other and with a consciousness of the historical conditions under which each man's thinking developed, in order to arrive at a full understanding of Marx's materialist views and to achieve the transformation he hoped for.

Mirror and Mask: Acting as Being, Representing, and Imagining

Marx was engaged in a study of and debate with Hegelian idealism and began writing at the incipient stages of industrial capitalism (right around the same time actor training began to gain significance), and his main criticism reflected the historical conflict between the ideal and "real" social experience. Marx's theory was that within Hegel's philosophy, ideas became objectified, mystified and static: transformation and movement, which happen when human bodies interact on a social level, was halted. As capitalism and commodification became more entrenched, they took on the Hegelian appearance of being *a priori* facts and their positive influence was deemed a given, which resulted in the reification of certain individuated ideas and categories—private property, for example, "the company" or "the state"—in much the same way aristocratic concepts of divine truth had been taken as fact. Marx, on the other hand, maintained that while those categories (and, by extension, individual humans) did indeed take on the *appearance* of having an existence of their own, they continued to be socially formed and historical, created by the people themselves, their daily interactions, and, most significantly for this project, their moving, changing bodies.

The fraught relationship between the "ideal" and the "real," particularly when it comes to representation, is an intricate and certainly an age-old one, repeatedly argued throughout the history of philosophy and particularly in dramatic theory and theatre – Plato promoted "truth" and supposed objectivity, for example, and Aristotle defended the power of fictional artistic expression. Throughout the history of theatre in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries new developments have most often arisen as a result of resistance or opposition to the dominant theories and practices of the time, and no matter what words are used to frame different aspects of the argument—the world as it is versus the world as it ought to be, social reality versus spiritual idealism, the body versus the brain, even phenomenology vs. semiotics—the theoretical question at the crux of these debates always involves, to some degree, the relationship between truth/reality/experience and imagination/ideal forms.

The argument surrounding abstract ideals and physical reality continues to be particularly significant to Marxist aesthetics. In my (here simplified) reading of Marx, his idea was to awaken the consciousness of the working class to two things: first, that their position as a class of laborers was not a given—it was a result of their placement in certain historical, social and economic circumstances; and second, that rather than being separate, abstract entities with a mystical life of their own, the same history and social structures that defined various categories of people grew out of the people's own effort, energy and interaction; and if this was the case, the state, the family, etc. *might also be changed* by the people. In other words, it was important to focus on the *real* lives of the people, because they were the actual source from which *ideal* concepts sprang.

Examining their true experiences together with what they could collectively imagine as new ideals might gradually change their circumstances. The application of Marx's theories to artistic expression has grown more and more complicated (and potentially confusing to the degree of eluding practical application) as it has grappled with the nuances of dialectical relationships, power, and change in an increasingly capitalist world.

What orthodox Marxists understood as the economic *base* of social relations that determined all of its *superstructural* expressions (art, political thought, religion, etc.), is revealed to be a more intricate web of relationships when one takes into account the interactive and processual elements of Marx's dialectical thinking (again, Marx himself acknowledged his historical indebtedbess to Hegel's ideals). For example, the implications of Hegel's concept that "personality" exists prior to and takes form as "person" has compelling implications for actors: it is akin to the Romantic idea that the portrayal of a character, emotion, etc. comes from an outer, mystical realm and enters the body of the actor in inexplicable ways. That is, in theatrical production, characters and emotions *do* rely on the existence of the actor as a conduit: Hegel's statement was that personality exists *only as* person. But although the relationship is dialectical in the sense that each is only partial on its own and relies on the other for existence, in Hegelian dialectics the ideal of "personality" always takes the subject position in the sentence, making the "person" the perpetual object driven by external forces that are obscure and abstract. In some ways, the *superstructure* is analogous to Hegel's "personality." If one substitutes "characterization" or "emotion" for the word "personality," Marx might

contend that rather than character or emotion always existing prior to being acted, the relationship is inverted—they are created by actors and audiences through the process of historical social interaction. But what happens after these emotions or ideas about people are created? Because they are artistic productions, do they become part of the cultural superstructure that supposedly lacks the power to change the system of exchange as it exists? It seems that in one interpretation of Marx, the labor of actors and other artists is doomed to be ineffectual.

Over the course of the study of culture and lingustics, especially within the framework of capitalist economy and in the age of electronic technology and disembodied image, it has become clear that the degree to which characteristics like "masculinity," for example, do have ideological power of their own and shape people's social interaction, which in turn influences the performances of actors who must be readable to audiences in order to make money; or alternately, actors who wish to see themselves as agents in a Marxian sense and resist the existing categories of masculine or feminine behavior might be understood to merely reinforce the ideal of "masculine" and give it credence by exerting energy to struggle against it, and the resistant characteristics they choose must be determined by the dominant ideal they wish to challenge. Their resistant efforts might also be absorbed by capitalist ideology and lose their power to destabilize existing ideology because of their perceived marketability. In short, whether the "personality" or the "person" is subject or object and whether or not one can choose any position vis a vis ideology becomes a tangled proposition. The power of dialectical

thinking becomes its ability to consider the ways in which subject and object determine meaning in constantly shifting exchanges that happen over time.

To determine how artistic representations, generally considered part of the cultural "personality" of a particular time and place (and therefore its superstructure), might help to bring about a renewed awareness of the human and embodied aspects of history and give people the revolutionary possibility of changing their (capitalist) world and making it more comfortable and equitable requires extra labor. Artists who are determined to produce efficacious work in the Marxian sense must dedicate themselves to complex investigations of history, economy, power and language if they are to guess which forms, content and processes might be the most effective at any given point in history. Acting, which directly involves human behavior within historic and economic circumstances, holds a great deal of revolutionary potential in part because it is embodied and temporal; discovering how to realize that potential is a daunting task, especially given the material necessities of living in the world. I maintain that it is an important and potentially rewarding work despite its sometimes discouraging and time consuming complexity.

The Enlightenment and The Science of Acting: Marx and Stanislavski in conversation with Diderot

I cite the basic definition of dialectical thinking, here, and am glossing Marx and Hegel in part as a reminder that history itself is most productively experienced as a changing process rather a series of isolated objects of analysis: even citing Marx's work as "foundational" is misleading to a certain extent, as he was consciously entering a

conversation that had been going on for centuries. Similarly, any analysis of the history of actor training in the United States today typically begins with Stanislavski, as he is hailed by most as the "father of modern acting." Stanislavski himself, however, was part of a widespread investigation of the "art of acting" at the end of the 19th century in Europe, which included the work of a number of important practitioners who had an interest in transforming previous acting techniques to better suit the technological and economic climate of the time. Many of these theorists were in dialogue with one of the most important philosophers of the Enlightenment – Diderot – a fact that lends credence to the idea that acting and the theories surrounding its practice were an important part of a significantly larger intellectual debate. As Alison Hodge points out, one of many events that had an impact on the development of actor training as a formalized practice in Europe was the publication of Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le Comedien* in 1830. Joseph Roach devotes an entire chapter of *The Player's Passion* to Diderot, pointing out that "To this day, many acting theorists, knowingly or unknowingly, formulate their views in response to perspectives introduced in the *Paradoxe"* (117). In other words, like Marx did with Hegel, acting theorists are often involved in a "transformational criticism" of Diderot that both makes use of and changes his ideas; and Diderot himself was a critic who proposed to transform previous understandings of how artistry was achieved.

Significantly, actors' contributions to the ongoing philosophical discussion about human behavior and agency are centered in the way identity, feeling and action can be produced with the human body. For the actor, whose body, as Joseph Roach emphasizes, always "constitutes his instrument, his medium, his chief means of creative expression"

(11) the ongoing question comes down to how best to train his or her body to achieve a particular relationship to truth or to imagined circumstances. In *The Player's Passion*, Roach argues that "conceptions of the human body drawn from physiology and psychology have dominated theories of acting from antiquity to the present. The nature of the body, its structure, its inner and outer dynamics, and its relationship to the larger world that it inhabits have been the subject of diverse speculation and debate" (11). Discovering how these conceptions of the body, the actor's use of it, and its relationship to truth or fiction are understood to resist or support relations of production at different stages in the history of actor training is one step towards adjusting current practices in a way that illuminates the power of the actor's body, encourages a responsible use of that power, and questions capitalist ideology without risking being eventually subsumed altogether by that system. The question—one that has been central in contemporary debates about both acting and power—might be phrased, "Is the body beholden to abstract ideals that form the basis of its interactions, or can bodies and their needs and interactions actually determine what those ideals are?" Roach poses the root question of modern acting in this way: "Is the actor's bodily instrument to be interpreted as a spontaneously vital organism whose innate powers of feeling must somehow naturally predominate? Or is it best understood as a biological machine, structured by and reducible to so many physical and chemical processes, whose receptivity to reflex conditioning determines its behavior?" (161). In other words, is spontaneous and inspired subjective experience more "truthful" for the actor, or can the process of acting be understood as an objective physical science with the goal of *representing* emotion? More

complexities enter the equation for the actor who has social transformation as a goal, and (as I emphasize in Chapter Two), the question with which activist actors are faced is one that is primary in contemporary life: what approach to the production and reproduction of *identity* and *feeling* might be the most ethical and potentially transformative?

Diderot was considered a "vitalist" who favored the biological approach to actors' work. His attempts to make the study of acting into a science are characteristic of an Enlightenment worldview that emphasized rationalism and objective, scientific explanations for concepts that had been previously considered spiritual or mystical. The Enlightenment focus on objectivity has been one theory questioned by contemporary critical thought, as the very idea that an objective viewpoint is possible has been all but discarded as hegemonic and supportive of dominant ideology. Enlightenment thinking, in fact, has occasionally been credited as laying the foundations for the development of capitalism, as analyzing the mechanics behind the creation of goods was considered progress—"man must try to understand nature so that he could more effectively control it and could increase the general wealth of the community" (Souboul 28)— and made possible mechanization, industrialization, and more efficient production. In this sense, Diderot's work made possible the professionalization and commodification of acting.

However, Enlightenment thinking was also the foundation of the French and American Revolutions, and signaled resistance to traditions based on spirituality that served to keep the aristocracy in power. D.M.G. Sutherland writes of the Enlightenment that, "As a cast of mind, it taught its followers to judge institutions by reason and utility, not by their antiquity or sacredness" (29). Although it is debatable to what degree it was

intended to do so, the association of truth and reality with objectivity, in this case, had the result of *questioning* the basis for the feudal economy, in which power and wealth were controlled by nobility that was determined by lineage and by the Catholic Church. Rational thinking resisted a mystical view of spirituality that supported beliefs about the dominance of the nobility and clergy, and which resulted in the oppression of people who did not belong to those classes. It was a movement associated with the growing middle class, rather than the laboring peasant class, but,

> The philosophy of the Enlightenment substituted for the traditional conception of life and society an ideal of social wellbeing based on a belief in the limitless progress both of the human spirit and of scientific knowledge. Man was to discover once again the dignity which he had lost. Liberty in every field, economic and political, was to stimulate his activity. (Souboul 28)

Because Diderot was writing at a time during which industrialism and capitalism had yet to take hold, studying the science and mechanics of professions such as acting also served the purpose of giving agency to oppressed classes: it put the ability and responsibility of shaping the world in the hands of human beings rather than some outside, unexplainable force acting upon them.

Diderot's interest, in many ways, was to *uncover the labor* behind the creation of a number of different "products," and it is no surprise that Marx was one of the philosopher's admirers. Roach points out that, in fact, Diderot was highly influential in post-revolutionary Russia—Lunacharskii, apparently, had studied 18th-century French

materialism, and made use of some of the revolutionary concepts from Diderot's long-suppressed *Plan of a University for the Government of Russia*. As Roach writes, "Diderot's materialism, atheism and revolutionary science seemed smartly in step with the new world order" (196-97). Roach emphasizes that Diderot's interest in acting and his work surrounding it was parallel to his work in the *Encyclopedie, ou Dictionnaire Raisonne des sciences, des arts, et des métiers*, in which he revealed the labor behind hundreds of different crafts and professions and demonstrated "to laymen that such mastery did not arise mysteriously from a source in the magical occult, bur from professional skills knowingly applied" (116). His project was to demystify how actors pursue their craft, and to reveal that their production of emotions and ideas (and hence something different than clocks or clothing or tangible items) was a physical, almost mechanical process, centered in the actor's body. Roach writes, "As the most fully informed philosopher ever to have addressed the art of acting, he knew that character emerges directly from the nervous system of the actor; it is not an Apollonian phantom entering the actor from without" (117).

According to Roach, Diderot's contributions to modern acting included both the idea that it is a process of work rather than a mystical expression of sensibility and the paradox itself, which questioned whether an actor could represent an interior model of a character or feeling without actually experiencing that character's emotions. Probing deeply into questions of consciousness and the interrelationship of mind and body and subjective experience and objective science in a way that seems to predict current studies of cognitive science (about which more later), one of Diderot's significant conclusions

was that "the bodily process of creating a theatrical illusion requires at the outset the participation of two interlocking functions: memory and imagination" (143). Unwittingly, perhaps, in the process of studying actors' practices, Diderot also may have uncovered one reason that actors are potentially dangerous to dominant points of view: their work always involves some dialectical combination of memory (in the Enlightenment view objective or "real" experience) and imagination (or "possibility"), and their goal is to combine those things in such a way that results in a particular kind of production: embodied identities that have thoughts, desires and emotions and interact with each other. In short, actors are involved with the business of creating an imagined world (that is based to some degree on their memories and experiences) *and* living, breathing, working and feeling in it. In Diderot's theory actors model the kind of *praxis* that Marx and many after him believed could transform the world.

19th Century Theories of Acting Real

Ultimately, while Diderot was concerned with revealing the physical processes behind acting, he was also an advocate of theatre performances that appeared closer to "nature." The goal of mastering the science of acting was to train the body to reproduce emotional "truth" in a way that appeared to be spontaneous, in contrast to the rigid structure and false mannerisms of Neoclassicism. The *Paradoxe's* placement of acting in the body rather than a metaphysical source opened up a realm of historical questions about reality and representation that were raised again and again throughout the late 19th and 20th centuries, and this debate was particularly active in 19th century Europe, when a number of schools that examined the theoretical and physical possibilities of acting were

developed. André Antoine's *Theatre Libre* in Paris, for example, was devoted to naturalism and representing the truth, and the actors "did not 'recite' their parts, they 'lived' them" (Cairns 62). Emile Zola (whose plays Antoine's theatre produced) wrote that artists and intellectuals in 19th century France followed after Enlightenment developments, and that Naturalism was "the return to nature and to man, direct observation, exact anatomy, the acceptance and depicting of what is," and that it "replaced abstractions by realities, empirical formulas by rigorous analysis. Thus, no more abstract characters in books, no more lying inventions, no more of the absolute; but real characters, the true history of each one, the story of daily life" (*Dramatic Theory* 696). He also writes, "the naturalistic formula will be to our century what the classical formula has been to past centuries" (*Dramatic Theory* 704).

In the circumstances under which Antoine and Zola were creating theatre – in which independent theatres undertook the necessary project of subverting the theatre of artifice that served to maintain status quo morality and social arrangement – their goal of total objectivity seemed the most efficacious means of illustrating the problems of poverty and injustice and exposing the "lies" behind theatre that did otherwise. But looking back at the naturalistic "formula"—which fell by the wayside while a less gritty realism took hold—it seems evident that their representations of "true history" through acting obscured the inevitable presence of one essential element of the *Paradoxe*: the actor's imagination. Naturalism may have represented the details of real experience but the theory ignored the necessary step of actors engaging their imaginations in the act of representing the world. In Marxian terms, naturalists might have intended the form of

their work to reveal that the source of character behavior, experience and emotion was people of all classes rather than idealized rules determined by an otherworldly source via a group of elite dramatists. However in practice, their great attention on reproducing environments might have reified the structures in which people were living; their stated goal of objectivity might be understood to create an alternate set of ideals and model a pattern of behavior that, in turn, led their audiences to believe that change was impossible.

Stanislavski, Realism and the Commodification of "The System"

Stanislavski's work was inspired by this historical and artistic environment, a legacy of the Enlightenment, that involved ongoing experimentation in the theory and practice of acting. In Raymond Williams' terms, his "System" was not always a product, but began as a dialectic process that involved inquiry and engagement with other Russian theatre artists, within his Studios with contemporaries including Meyerhold, Vakhtangov, and other artists associated with the Moscow Art Theatre, and with philosophers across cultures and time periods. It is important to note that Stanislavski himself *was an actor* and his ongoing intellectual and practical project arose out of a preoccupation with how different ways of using the actor's body resulted in different qualities of performance, the need to find ways to make the body and emotions succumb to the actor's will, and the desire to pass that methodology on to other actors. His interest was in making the actor the agent or subject and his or her character the predicate of the sentence. He studied Diderot, among other thinkers on acting, with the goal of clarifying the techniques with which he had been experimenting and systematizing his methods (Roach 195). He was

also deeply influenced by his life as a spectator—he developed standards for judging his own work through watching the realist plays produced at the Mali Theatre in Moscow. As Robert Benedetti points out, Pushkin, Gogol and the actor Mikhail Shchepkin were debating the question of verisimilitude and the representation of truth in the actor's art when the Mali Theatre was founded in 1823, and actors who worked at that theatre, such as Aleksandr Lenski, continued to work on ways to find "the inner logic of the character's psychology" (17).

Diderot and the artists working at the Mali Theatre were only two among Stanislavski's many interlocutors. He also admitted to having been influenced by the Meiningen players' visit to Moscow and the work of Italian actor Tommaso Salvini, among others (18). His critical observance and practical adaptation of their ideas suggest that his ongoing investigation of ways to "live the part" rather than simply represent it was one extension of a moving historical process. While his goal might have been to settle upon a concrete set of rules for actors to follow, it is clear that at this stage, Stanislavski's working methodology was not a settled "system." Adrian Cairns asks the question, "What was being taught that was so new and special? Can it be summarized? Not really, because Stanislavski was always changing his mind" (92). As Sharon Carnicke points out, his interest was really in the pedagogy of acting in general, and he "willingly embraced anything that would illuminate acting and drama" (13), but only certain aspects of what he studied became reified, especially later in this country, as "the" craft of acting. What was it that turned this intellectual exploration of various kinds of plays and philosophies regarding how to embody them into "Stanislavski's System"?

What conditions turned the "System" into an object associated with one person instead of a mode of inquiry shared by a company of actors, writers and artists? And what made certain elements of that system so appealing to American practitioners?

Individuating and objectifying what is, in actuality, a moving and changing collective effort is one of the results of a capitalist system of production and consumption, and also a key premise through which commercial culture grows and spreads. In Bruce McConachie's essay cited above, he questions what led people to associate the aesthetic practices of theatre with the word "production," which had previously referred to economic activity, and ultimately associates the beginnings of the terms "producer" and "production" with the development of capitalism. He states that under that system, "group creation gave way to individual production, the 'individual' being either a capitalist or a corporation, the legal extension and enhancement of individual power under capitalism" (171). The commercial impulse that began with industrial capitalism essentially caused a shift in focus—while it was still (and in theatre, perhaps increasingly so) the interaction and labor of a group that was responsible for a theatrical event, terming theater a "production" made it into a commercial entity, the profits from which went into the hands of an individual or corporate "producer."

As McConachie makes clear, privileging individual power over group process stimulates the growth of a capitalist economy. Associating something that is actually the changing, moving labor of a group with one famous name facilitates its existence as a static and unchanging commodity, more easily exchanged for money. Then, as the system of commerce becomes more and more entrenched, the ideal of valuing individuality over

group activity takes on the appearance of being common sense. The process of commodification has a hegemonic effect similar to Hegel's idealism, in that it objectifies and reifies the products of human labor by separating those products from the physical bodies that created them; the value of commodities to the lives of laborers is unclear, as the products are taken away to be exchanged in the marketplace to make profit for a "capitalist" manager or producer (or, in contemporary terms, a corporation—which is represented as a unified entity). As Marx writes, "That which in the labourer appeared as movement, now appears in the product as a fixed quality without motion. The blacksmith forges and the product is a forging" (*Capital* 347). The abstraction that happens afterwards, when the blacksmith's forging is taken from his hands, sold for currency of which he sees only a small fraction, and is stripped of its direct use value or meaning for him, is what Marx terms alienation.

Actors are, of course, different than blacksmiths in that the product of their work—particularly in live theatre—is inseparable from their bodies and always involves movement, interaction and exchange with other actors and with audiences. Even in training and rehearsal, the goal of what actors do is not to create some object, but an *experience*. Nonetheless, in a capitalist economy, experiencing an evening of theatre becomes a commodity to be exchanged for money; and that money most often does not go directly to a group of actors. When a "producer" or even a "director" is involved, a production generally is attributed to that person's name. If there *is* a "star" actor involved, his or her creation of a personality, character, emotion, an idea, even a particular way of working, is turned into a reified commodity—the physical movement, interaction with

history and other people, and potential for transformation that is inherent in actors' work is hidden from them. When their collective engagement with important ideas is taken away and associated with a particular individual, they lose sight of the fact that their work produces important questions and concepts, and they become less aware of their potential generative power. It is important to note (as will become more clear in later chapters) that the process of individuation is characteristic of capitalism because it facilitates the exchange of ideas and practices as abstract objects (*things* that do not move around or change too much will not slip out of one's hands as they are passed from person to person), but that individuals with strong and solid ideas are not automatically devoted to financial profit. A charismatic director or actor might also inspire in people the pursuit of other artistic goals (or, as Stella Adler suggests in the epigraph, a sovereign nation like America might be devoted to intellectual concepts). But because these directors, producers or actors exist within the ideological framework of capitalism, separating their work from the practices of a group allows them to more easily be subsumed into a money-based economy and at the same time models and reproduces the kind of objectification that makes possible the pervasiveness of profit-driven exchange.

While Diderot's interest in the science of acting was supportive of an intellectual and economic revolution, the placement of Stanislavski's work in the environment of competitive capitalism diluted its potential socially active aims. While his work owed a great deal to the resistance of mystical views that supported the rule of a landowning aristocracy, Stanislavski's family reaped economic benefit from the growing power of the merchant classes under capitalist development—a power that ultimately resulted in

equally unjust exploitation of working class labor. He came from a family of wealthy manufacturers, and he began his life in privilege. As Sharon Carnicke writes, "He expressed adolescent theatrical impulses in a fully equipped theatre, built by his father in 1877 at the family estate, and, as he grew, he often used his wealth to further his talents as actor and director" (11). To a certain degree, capitalism and the wealth it produced underwrote the beginnings of Stanislavski's intellectual activity. In the planning stages of the Moscow Art Theatre, Nemirovich Danchenko suggested that Stanislavski use his family's money to fund the theatre in order to maintain the integrity of its educational ideals, but he preferred to launch a public company from the very beginning. Benedetti writes that Stanislavski never used any of his family's funds for the MAT, in part because a private company "would immediately be labeled a money-making exercise. A public company, on the other hand, would be seen as a philanthropic, educational undertaking" (61). Stanislavski's goals were, as he puts it, "philanthropic" and "educational," not individual or financial, and his worry was that separate financial control would make his work into a capitalist venture. The idea behind making the company a public endeavor was to democratize the work and make it responsible and relevant to a community of people.

Despite Stanislavski's familiarity with the merchant class who would be their supporting audience, his reasoning in this case was flawed. It may have been true that connecting the theatre financially with Stanislavski's family fortune would have been a step that appeared commercial, and making it public was a step toward community ownership. But in the long run, regardless of its initial funding, because the goal of the

MAT was *professional* and the ultimate goal was to exchange productions for money, it had to be somewhat more clearly defined and solidified than uncommodified laboratory processes in order to be consumed by the theatre's middle class audience and appeal to their tastes. As such, it would have to be focused on producing specific, consistent "bourgeois" qualities in performance to satisfy its patrons, and the room for pedagogical and artistic experimentation was limited.

It is interesting to note that the "system" of training that is traditionally used in North American programs was, when it was introduced in Russia, thought of as strange and eccentric because it involved experimentation with theatre of all sorts. Sharon Carnicke suggests that the capitalist goals of the Moscow Art Theatre were the reason for the continued association of Stanislavski's work only with realism. She writes that Stanislavski threatened to resign if the company did not adopt his methods, but Nemirovich-Danchenko and the company had serious doubts. "Whilst the actors saw his experimentation as eccentric, Danchenko considered 'Stanislavskiitis' dangerous to the stability of the theatre. … As a sharp businessman, he insisted that the Theatre build firmly on its initial success with realistic styles" (13). Adrian Cairns points out that, while Nemirovich-Danchenko was "nervous" about any ongoing experimentation, it was he, as manager of the theatre, who in the end required the actors to study Stanislavski's techniques (47). Regardless, the pressure for the theatre to make money with realist plays "clipped [Stanislavski's] wings in other directions" (Carnicke 13). The continued experimentation to discover new forms of training was eventually conducted with Meyerhold and other actors outside of the confines of the theatre proper because, as

Stanislavski wrote, their experimental goals "demanded full realization in laboratory work. For that there was no place in the Theatre with its daily performances, its complex duties and its severely economical budget" (*My Life in Art* 430).

The status of the MAT productions as commodities combined with the reification of Stanislavski's set of tools as an objective science of acting to be applied to any theatrical problem raises issues about ethical representation of identities and classes of people when the plays must appeal to middle class tastes for financial survival. As a materialist reaction against spiritual idealism of the same sort with which Diderot and Marx were both arguing, realism would appear to be potentially successful – it purports to be a "truthful representation" of people in their actual material lives, and might be used to reveal the social problems as they exist (as in Ibsen's plays intended to do, for example) and explain to a class of people the necessity to change their surroundings. While Namirovich had to take care to assure the City Council that the theatre was to appeal to a middle class audience, Stanislavski privately stated, "We are attempting to bring light into the lives of the poorer classes. … We are trying to create the first rational, moral public theatre" (Benedetti 68). Generally, however, criticisms of realism as it was produced at the Moscow Art Theatre suggest that it served to naturalize and solidify bourgeois values rather than suggesting the possibility of movement and change. Jean Benedetti suggests the importance of making an impression on the middle class audience with the Theatre's initial offering, Tolstoy's *Tsar Fiodor Ioannovich*:

> Moscow society awaited the opening of the new theatre and *Tsar Fiodor* with great excitement and not a little malice. They admired Stanislavski,

> he had been their idol, but they were also quite prepared to see him fall flat on his face. A failure would prove how stupid it was to transgress the code of one's class. On the other side there were those, the young, the intellectuals, who pinned their hopes on the new company. Stanislavski and Nemirovich knew there was only one answer: *epater les bourgeois*. They needed an unqualified success, a smash (81).

To some degree, Stanislavski's increased insistence on faithfulness to reality was meant to shock the middle class, through the sheer virtuosity of the performance, into social consciousness. His hands were also tied by the bounds of financial success: the audience's sensibilities could not be offended so much that they would not return.

His means of tackling this initial play, which marked the beginnings of Stanislavski's working methodology, included detailed intellectual investigation and engagement with the script as well as with the people whose lives it addressed. Benedetti writes that, "The company were slowly introduced to Stanislavski's working method, reading, research and extensive, detailed rehearsals 'at the table.' … Stanislavski wrote to Namirovich that the atmosphere was more like a University than a theatre" (69). According to Meyerhold and others, this University was devoted to historical accuracy:

> It was soon made clear to the cast that the reality of their acting was expected to match the reality of the sets. There were to be no actors' tricks, no 'peasant' acting of the traditional kind. A truthful presentation of the people was essential to the meaning of the production. Stanislavski

> took the view that although the play might be called *Tsar Fiodor* the real center of the piece was the Russian people themselves. (71)

His experiments with this play, in an attempt "not to present the conventionalized Russia which could be seen on the Mali stage" included taking the cast on trips to various towns on the Volga River to witness and understand the character (and characters) of Russia (68). The process through which the company prepared for this play involved a concern with ethics in representation of the people's "inner lives" that was previously not practiced, and Stanislavski's interest was in making the subject of the play a varied group instead of one individual character. Although virtuositic representations were the goal, the need to turn the research process into a commodity for the sake of consumption by the middle class limited the degree to which surprising or unexpected results from this experimentation might have appeared in the final production, and the limited time reigned in its populist and unconventional goals. In addition, the people who had the money to purchase tickets or who were theatre-goers already did not, generally, include the working class or the peasants whom the MAT actors were studying, and so the success or failure of the production did not require them to live up to the expectations of the very people whose lives they were putting onstage.

The many contradictions raised by the anti-bourgeois impulses of the company's work in combination with the theatre's need to make money by appealing to the class whose values it hoped to question become more evident when considering later realist productions at the MAT, particularly *The Cherry Orchard*, which was the last play written by Chekhov for the company. Chekhov, apparently, wanted Stanislavski to play

the role of Lopakhin, the serf-turned-merchant who buys the cherry orchard and intends to use it for a capitalist venture, and Stanislavski resisted for various reasons. While he gave the prospect of playing Lopakhin a great deal of thought, he ended up in the role of Gaev, Madame Ranevskaya's impractical, idealistic philosopher of a brother. Benedetti suggests that this may have to do with economic class: "Stanislavski may not have wanted to be identified in the public mind with a class which, on the whole, he despised and from which, with a few exceptions, he had distanced himself' (128). While Benedetti denies that this choice of roles is related to Stanislavski's political views, he points out that the master knew with which characters he could most believably (especially in the eyes of the MAT's audience) identify internally: the solidly middle class intellectuals and idealists. His concern with "living the part," in the case of the roles he was willing to play because of the degree of believability he could produce, prevented him from fully engaging with a type other than his own, *imagining* himself into a character's inner life, and changing the perception of that particular character type by convincingly taking the role onto his body. In this case, character identity is determined by social mechanisms, but the ability of transformation and movement is halted by the application of Stanislavski's theories about realistic acting in the context of a professional performance that requires actors to closely resemble the identities they take on in order to be successful.

Examining Stanislavski's work on that production in more depth, however, makes clear how physical indicators of the characters' social functions were combined with detailed instructions about their actions and, importantly, *how they felt* about those

actions in order to create the interpretation of the play; these elements operated as different interactive, moving parts of the production as a whole. Stanislavski's detailed instructions in his rehearsal notebooks indicate that, as a director, he was very specific about how the play should be interpreted—using his techniques for portraying internal psychology— in order to be well received by the MAT's audience. Benedetti quotes this section of the notebooks:

> Ranevskaia: Has the cherry orchard been sold?
>
> Lopakhin: {*202 Guiltily. Examining his handkerchief. Looks down. Doesn't answer at once*}. It has.
>
> Ranevskaia: {*203 Pause. Barely audible*} Who bought it?
>
> Lopakhin: {*204 Pause. Even quieter and more embarrassed*} I bought it. {*205 Agonizing pause. Lopakhin feels badly and this arouses the beast in him. The awkwardness of his position starts to make him angry. He nervously pulls at his handkerchief…*}. (131)

In this case, Stanislavski's status as the play's director and his desire for a unified production overshadow the fact that he is also an actor, and is clearly able to *imagine* the character of Lopakhin empathically, despite the fact that he claimed that he would not be right for the role. Even though Stanislavski's choice to take on the role for which he might be deemed most suited by audience standards reinforced the personality types of both idealist intellectuals and ambitious capitalists, there remained plenty of room for commenting on the characters' actions. The actor playing Lopakhin might, on his own, have decided to interpret the man as having unbridled joy at his new acquisition of the

orchard, producing a different meaning for this scene. But the movement and interaction involved in dialogue with his company—in choosing which characteristics to combine with what kinds of emotional responses to produce various meanings, and other internal conflicts with the playwright and other people working on the production—were frozen by the necessity to have a strong director who could provide audiences with a consistent product. Stanislavski's own characterizations and interpretations were set in place, as was his procedure for how an actor should relate realistically to a character.

Interestingly, while one of the assumptions about Stanislavski's technique that emerged as it was exported to the United States was that it should always be used to serve the playwright's intentions, Chekhov believed he had written a completely different play than Stanislavski had produced. *The Cherry Orchard* was a comedy, in his mind, while the MAT production, at least as it stood shortly before Chekhov's death, was tragic in tone. The fixed interpretation attributed to Stanislavski was a result of the production's status as a commodity—as was the way Stanislavski's "System" lent itself to play interpretation. He himself claimed that he was equally concerned with how to devise an objective foundational technique for the actor dedicated to truthful playing and with questions regarding untapped possibilities for the actor's imagination. He wrote, "Is it possible that we, the artists of the stage, are fated, due to the materiality of our bodies, to the eternal service and expression of coarse realism and nothing else? Are we not called to go any farther than the realists in painting were in their time?" (*My Life in Art* 428). Stanislavski's "System," then, was in truth a contested set of rules that arose out of dialogue between him and other artists. It was full of contradictions and questions, but

eventually took on the appearance of being a reified product that could be sold to other actors and other companies.

Selling The System in the U.S.

The process of commodifying the "System" in a way that privileged certain elements of Stanislavski's work continued as it was exported to the United States. Stanislavski and the MAT were ruined financially after the Bolshevik revolution, and he took the company on tour through Europe and the United States in 1922-24, staging *The Cherry Orchard* and other productions in order to make money. Some of the company's members remained in the United States rather than returning to the Soviet Union, most significantly Maria Ouspenskaya, Richard Boleslavsky, and Michael Chekhov (Carnicke 14). Ouspenskaya and Boleslavsky were certainly not the first to open an acting school in the United States. As Adrian Cairns points out, the first University program offering a theatre degree was Pittsburgh's Carnegie Institute of Technology in 1917, predating the visit of the Moscow Art Theatre by several years (22). But the dissemination of the concepts being investigated by Stanislavski, which are now so widely established as the foundation of the craft of acting in training programs in this country, was no doubt in part due to the influence of this visit and the establishment of the American Laboratory Theatre.

In its early stages, the pedagogical techniques continued to involve dialectical adaptation and exploration, and The American Laboratory Theatre was expressly focused on ensemble work. Foster Hirsch writes that, "With a fervor that must surely have struck some of his American students with its distinctly un-American sentiment, Boleslkavsky

idealized the benefits of group training" (60). He also insisted that American students learn to take Stanislavski's principles and transform them into something specific to their own cultural backgrounds. The tenets they followed were: "1. This theatre must grow here by itself and must get its roots into American soil. 2. It must begin slowly, training young Americans for the stage in all its departments. 3. It must be recognized and organized as a living social force, recreating itself each generation from the thoughts and material of its own times" (Hirsch 59-60). Twenty students at the school worked for months on a production of a play by Princess Amelie Troubetzkoy (a senator's daughter from Virgina who had married a Russian prince) entitled *the Sea Woman's Cloak*. The process for this production involved classroom work, rehearsal workshops and, finally, a public performance for paying audiences—the research and preparation process were more important to the company than the final product, which ended up being very well-received by its audiences regardless.

While the rehearsals for this production were clearly an ongoing and moving process, the American Laboratory Theatre's experimentation was not able to remain completely insulated from the economic and systemic pressures of capitalism. The Lab was financed by a wealthy patron named Miriam Stockton who, like Stanislavski, had wealth that afforded her the time and luxury to focus only on "artistic" values, and she and other patrons encouraged Bolaslavski to direct the school in order to develop the refined artistic sensibilities of the MAT's Russian visitors in young American actors. After the initial stages of the school's development, both Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya took on commercial work to supplement their incomes, Boleslavsky as a director on

Broadway and Ouspenskaya in small roles in Hollywood films (which performances Hirsch describes as "archly theatrical, 'Russian' in a sentimental, what-the market-wants manner" (63)). When Stockton took issue with Boleslavsky's commercial work, he criticized Broadway's capitalist, money driven tendencies and protested that real art was difficult to come by in this country, but defended his choices by saying that he had to survive in a practical sense. After several years during which he was often absent from teaching, the American Lab Theatre folded and Boleslavsky moved to Hollywood to direct films. The work both he and Ouspenskaya did for commercial purposes seems to be less focused on translating Stanislavski's work for ensembles of American actors and more likely to result in stereotypical, rigid reproductions of Russian "personality."

Although he was dedicated to ensemble playing, the need to settle on certain rules for an objectified technique was also among Boleslavsky's goals, and this point might also have contributed to The System's eventual commodification. He was reported to be a charismatic lecturer and dynamic teacher, he had the exotic aura of being a Russian émigré, and while adapting the rules of acting was in practice a group effort of the American Laboratory students and teachers, Boleslavsky's individual name was more easily packaged and marketed as the author of this methodology. His early insistence on developing the processual, investigative, ensemble oriented spirit of Stanislavski's work was deprioritized when it came time to set technical rules down in written form. His book, which came out before Stanislavski's own writing was translated into English and was therefore the first published manual of Stanislavski-based techniques in the United States, is still assigned in training programs across the country. Like Stanislavski's works

on “the actor,” the book’s dialogic form reflects the dilemma of an artist devoted to dialectical thinking within a capitalist culture. The collection is an adaptation of some of Boleslavsky’s lectures at the American Lab, and is written in the form of a dialogue between himself (“I”) and the acting student (a young girl he calls “the creature”). In her introduction, Edith Isaacs sees his writing style as a reflection of the unique intellectual contribution of an actor. She writes,

> The actor is usually word-shy and inarticulate. Often he does not know what it is he does or how he does it, that makes him an actor. Even if when he knows, it is difficult for him to say it or write it. He can only express it in action. His language is a language of movement, of gesture, of voice, of the creation and projection of character by things done or left undone. (8)

Thus, even though *Acting: The First Six Lessons* is itself a commodity, the idea of “acting” as a finished product is balanced by Boleslavsky’s choice to constructed as a dialogue. Its title might also be understood as an indication that learning cannot truly be simplified enough to be summarized in a few rules. These lessons are only “the first six” among many other possible ones, and “an actor cannot be made between luncheon and dinner. … the profession may take a lifetime of work” (11). While the simple summary of “acting” sells books, the idea that it can be pinned down, objectified and described within the covers of a book is only an illusion perpetuated by the drive for profit.

The Group Theatre’s Reanimation of Stanislavski

Although the American Laboratory Theatre folded, the process of interrogating Stanislavski’s work was continued by The Group Theatre, who met outside of the context

of the American Laboratory to conduct their own theatrical investigations. There was quite a bit of activity in the realm of activist performance during the 1930s—the Living Newspapers and other projects undertaken by the WPA Federal Theatre Project were considered "documentary" plays, taking as their subject matter relevant issues of the time. Clurman and Clifford Odets followed this pattern, turning their observations of the economic conditions in New York during the Great Depression into productions such as *Waiting for Lefty* in 1935, which addressed the Taxi Strike of 1934. In this particular set of economic and cultural circumstances, The Group was using the principles of "realistic" acting in much the same way they were used in France in the late 18th Century –representing the abominable conditions of the increasingly impoverished working class in order to reach for a transformation of those conditions.

The Group's original impulse was in resistance to the commercial world of Broadway theatre, and they were specifically interested in the combination of activism and theatre. The training they undertook together was closely focused on the interaction of a group of people rather than on the strength of individual actors alone, and Adrian Cairns points out that they considered their work "a training ground for citizenship" (134). As Harold Clurman wrote, "We must help one another find our common ground; we must build our house on it, arrange it as a dwelling place for the whole family of decent humanity. For life, though it be individual to the end, cannot be lived except in terms of people together, sure and strong in their togetherness" (*Fervent Years* 30). Clurman had studied in Europe during the rich time in which Stankislavski's work was being developed and training schools were being established, wrote a thesis at the

Sorbonne on French Drama of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and saw the Moscow Art Theatre perform before their tour of the United States. Like Stanislavski, he read widely in the theory and history of acting, and was devoted to experimentation in theatre (Cairns 132). While the establishment of Method acting in the United States is usually associated with the individual names of Clurman, Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, Cheryl Crawford, Elia Kazan and Sanford Meisner, the revolutionary work The Group produced in New York in the 1930s was truly the result of the collective attempt of 28 actors and three directors to experiment with the ideas they learned from Russian and European sources and create something relevant to their own time and place.

Like The MAT and the American Lab before them, The Group's work could not escape economic pressures forever. There were a number of factors that affected the activity of The Group and contributed to its demise, including artistic differences and personality conflicts. However, Adrian Cairns suggests that their real downfall was the inability to find a permanent location or a source of regular funding to pay actors and support their work (136). Despite Clurman's opinion that theories of acting should remain the secrets of the actors rather than be released to the wider public (a deliberate mystification of process that defined these people as "*The* Group" rather than "group theatre" in general, which, I would argue, also contributed to the later reification of the training as "*The* Method"), some members of The Group attempted to start an actual training school associated with the company that was open to other actors. The school closed shortly after it was opened, in part because of the company's rigorous touring schedule, and a wider public did not have direct access to the ideas behind the training

until members of the company conducted private lessons or taught in other New York schools to support themselves. It was after The Group dissolved that Adler, Crawford, Kazan, Strasberg and Meisner started their own schools and "an indirect Group training took root and had its more lasting influence" (135). Already, the training began to be individualized and the collective, activist elements that were foregrounded by The Group began to dissipate.

The training eventually became a commodity itself, and the link between The Method, Strasberg, and actors' genuine production of emotion on film were how it entered the popular imagination. As David Krasner points out, "The term Method Acting itself is most closely associated with Strasberg and the Actors Studio," and his particular emphasis on leading actors through affective memory exercises designed to reach an actor's subjective emotional triggers (*20th Century* 134). Initially, though, Strasberg himself wanted primarily to train actors in a way that resisted commodification. As David Garfield writes,

> Strasberg, who was reading a great deal of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky at the time, defined the actor's problems in Marxist terms. … The actor in the American theater was a 'commodity.' He was a victim of the 'type system,' which in the craft of acting paralleled the capitalist system of production at its zenith. Typing an actor was industrializing him and turning him into a mechanism for manufacturing a specific product; typing or commodifying was the inevitable result of the capitalist development of

> the theater as a business. In such a theater the actor felt there was no opportunity to develop artistically or technically. (21)

This interest in celebrating a Marxist-inspired playing style in resistance to Broadway's aristocratic bent is also underlined by Colin Counsell, who writes that Strasberg considered The Group's work "proletarian theatre": "If aristocrats are formal and mannered, masters of the stage's artificial conventions, proletarians lack such mastery and are rough and awkward. But by avoiding established formulas they are free, capable of genuine expression" (55). Adler had similar anti-capitalist concerns – in the quote I used as an epigraph to this chapter, she states in a television interview with Bob Crane in the early 1960s that the country was at a turning point when it came to acting, and that Amercian actors were in danger of prioritizing individual monetary gain rather than investigation into larger cultural and intellectual concepts.

They held similar anti-commercial and artistic goals, but The Group famously—like the Moscow Art Theatre—had to struggle with internal conflicts on many issues. In other words, rather than being a unified and monolithic entity dedicated to rigid principles, the ensemble was a changing, multifaceted organism. But despite internal conflicts, The Group was able to sustain enough commonality to continue its activities for some time. As Helen Krich Chinoy writes in the introduction to her collection of interviews reprinted from *Educational Theatre Journal*, "The probing of the inner life, the wrangling, the apostasies, all would seem to add up to a disastrous experience for the participants. Yet something uniquely rewarding held them together" (447).

Most sources cite the intellectual disagreement regarding methodology between Strasberg and Adler as the most significant in the company's history, and some even go so far as to attribute The Group's demise to that argument. Adler, having gone to study with Stanislavski, stated that The Group was approaching things in the wrong way, and that they should consider the importance of the outward physical circumstances of the play rather than simply the actor's personal truth. Strasberg, who was influenced not only by Stanislavski but also by Vakhtangov, insisted, for the most part, on emotional truth. Their investigations into these problems of acting —for Adler, imagination, circumstances and theatricality; for Strasberg, strong emotional truth and personal connection—and those of Sanford Meisner, whose focus was on impulse and immediate behavior—continued on into the decades after the Group split apart. What might have been considered the inevitable difficulties faced by actors in dialogue with each other about questions of representation and craft has often been understood as an irreconcilable difference between individual teachers.

The individualization of the training schools and the conflict among the members of The Group might be seen as both a function of and reason for the commodification of acting—rather than being understood as an ongoing conversation about particular problems, each separate "answer" became a particular school. Kazan, Crawford, and later Strasberg started The Actor's Studio, Stella Adler began her Conservatory, and Meisner worked with the Neighborhood Playhouse. In addition to individuating their concerns about acting, the need to support themselves led many Group members, like Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya before them, to sell their skills to Broadway, film and television to

make a living. Stella Adler, while she consistently warned against giving in to commercial motives, eventually opened a branch of her conservatory in Los Angeles and taught courses there. In the Stella Adler archive recently acquired by the Harry Ransom Center for Humanities Research are some notes transcribed from a course on "The Meisnerian Method" taught by Meisner himself in Hollywood, at the end of which some participating actors were selected to be contract players for Twentieth Century Fox. Strasberg took over the role of director at The Actors Studio from Elia Kazan while he became a successful director, first on Broadway and later in Hollywood. Even though each individual teacher was devoted to investigating a different aspect of acting that was in truth only one part of a dialectical process—emotion, character, behavior, etc.— the separate schools claimed objectivity because of the need to understand "the art of acting" as a sellable commodity. Interestingly, while Krasner points out that Strasberg is most often associated with The Method, each teacher claimed the term or some variation of it at some point in his or her teaching. The use of the title might be understood as a way to continue the spirit of The Group after its dissolution, showing that although there were differences, there was also a commonality of purpose that held the members together as a family. Because of the continued circulation of actor training in an increasingly capitalist economy, however, it might also be analyzed as one way the process of work was further subsumed and packaged under one name so that it might be more easily bought and sold.

The Method, The Regional Theatre Movement and University Theatre Programs

The dispersal of The Method, or Stanislavski-derived theories of acting, around the country was another outgrowth of capitalist goals and resistance to them. The growing pressure towards commercialization placed geographic limitations on those who wished to make careers as actors, as New York and Los Angeles became the commercial (and therefore "legitimate," in a money-based culture) centers for theatre and film artists. The regional theatre movement began as an attempt to resist this profit-driven and coastal bias. Joseph Ziegler counts The Group, which he calls "a theatrical commune," and the Actors Studio after it, as precursors to the regional theatre movement. He cites the "commercial Broadway theatre as it existed then and as it exists now" as the reason for The Group's demise, as well as the allure of film opportunities on the West Coast (14). The regional theatre movement was an attempt, as Ziegler sees it, to decentralize geographically, giving local communities a closer connection to theatre, and also to decommercialize it. He points out that after World War II, to a new generation of well-educated and well-traveled theatre-makers "work in the theatre—any theatre—was far more important to them than where their theatre might be located" and that "in addition to working locally, the regional theatres were dedicated to permanence, ensemble actors and the production of classics; rather than commerce, art was their ultimate goal" (15-16).

Interestingly, however, while the Little Theatre movement at the turn of the century was focused on the interactive work of groups, Zeigler points out that regional theatres seemed to require a focus on strong individual leadership (hence, the necessity

for each to have an artistic director). He writes, "There was always one person who either began the group or quickly took control. Decisions were more a matter of decree, even when they appeared to be arrived at by the group. That one person's rule was absolute, if not despotic. The first regional theatres were expressions of the very real ambitions of their leaders" (25). One might also flip Zeigler's analysis to suggest that the collective labor of the groups of people that comprise these theatres was represented to the American public as the work of one person because of the pressure exerted in a capitalist economy to do so[2]. The tendency of these theatres to be publicized as the product of strong leaders—Minneapolis' Guthrie Theatre was associated with Garland Wright, Actors Theatre of Louisville with Jon Jory, etc.—could have proven to be an effective way to counter the growing profit motives of Broadway and Hollywood. The American focus on individual strength was built into their structures from the beginning, but they were not-for-profit organizations. Their dedication was, purportedly, to Art rather than Money, in an attempt to create what Stella Adler might call strong regional "cultural symbols" dedicated to intellectual and social questions. But at the same time the hierarchy of their structures attributed Art to the mind of a particular individual and potentially reinforced an elitist concept of who should be involved in making and judging theatre. This was a flaw in the makeup of the regional theatres that might have undermined the goal of democratizing theatre and making it relevant to diverse groups

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[2] This has happened even with the most radical of theatre companies: Yolanda Broyles-Gonzales argues that the association of El Teatro Campesino with the name of Luis Valdez is the result of the "great man" narrative of capitalism.

people within their particular geographical areas. If the artistic director was an expert on what were the most compelling, germane or important plays to be done, why wouldn't experts in theatrical centers like New York be even more attuned to which theatre was The Best? Perhaps in part as a result of the ideological underpinnings of their processes, regional theatres were later gradually absorbed, to varying degrees, into the commercially-driven system: their reliance on the patronage of season subscribers who wanted to see nationally popular plays or work previously produced on Broadway about which they had heard required these houses to balance new work or classics with commercial selections.

The association of the regional theatre movement with MFA acting programs at universities across the country had the potential to refocus actors' priorities in training and make their work more directly engaged with the communities in which they lived. However, the need for training programs to instill techniques that would make actors viable in a commercial market limited their ability to experiment with finding new forms of training and rehearsal or producing work specifically suited to each local region. The relationship between professional actor training programs and regional theatres ended up reifying certain elements Method-based training as *the* craft of acting even further. Ziegler's book on the regional theatre movement, which was published in the late 1970s, ends with a focus on training. He calls for regional theatres to initiate a change "that defines the character of a theatre as a reflection of its region" (249), and points out that the challenge, then, is in training young people from local communities. He also writes,

> In America, young people have been trained for professional theatre careers primarily in colleges and Universities and in acting schools in New York. The latter have taught techniques for the commercial Broadway stage and for films and television; the former, with few exceptions, have simply perpetuated anti-professional prejudices and have produced graduates suited not for the profession but rather only for teaching other people to teach people, ad infinitum (249).

The exceptions Ziegler notes are The Yale School of Drama under Robert Brustein, and its association with Yale Repertory, Wayne State University's association with the Hilberry Classic Theatre, Trinity University and the Dallas Theatre Center, and other local university training programs that had allied themselves with fully operational professional theatres.

Interestingly, rather than siding with the pedagogical and *academic* programs at colleges or universities, BFA and MFA programs have become increasingly like the "acting schools in New York" that taught techniques for commercial media. Actors trained in programs connected with regional theatres are not all selected from local communities, nor do they usually find work and stay in the regions where they are trained. The cooperative relationship, especially between MFA acting programs and regional professional theatres, has continued. But as the regional theatres have struggled to remain financially viable and also artistically "legitimate," the economic needs luring actors and artists to one or the other of the coasts have also intensified. The financial allure of film and television combined with the need for regional theatres to do work that

has proven commercially successful places pressure on training programs to produce actors ready for the market. Consequently, the rift that Ziegler noticed between professional training and education emphasizing pedagogy, process and intellectual engagement has extended to departments within Universities themselves.

The chasm between practical professional programs and educational ones dedicated to intellectual investigations deepened after World War II in the United States. In "Changing Views of Knowledge and the Struggle for Undergraduate Theatre Curriculum," Anne Berkeley discusses utilitarian vs. humanist/liberal arts theories of education and traces the history of theatre programs along these lines. She states that shortly after the war, educational theatre emphasized humanist and literary ideals, but professionalization soon became a significant priority:

> In the 1950s, the aim of training teachers and other practitioners for a growing non-profit theatre increased courses specializing in the crafts of production, establishing a rift between those who favored a general liberal arts focus and those who wished to centralize specialized theatre training. Others sought to combine both goals. With the postwar prosperity, together with a progressive drive in the 1960s, theatre educators sharply diverged from their predecessors by explicitly designing curricula for the burgeoning professional regional theatre. (23)

Berkeley argues that it was during this last period, when they geared their curricula to professionalism, that theatre studies programs gave in to the drive toward efficiency and expertise, "completing a transformation from humanism to utilitarianism—from literary

interpretation to technical training, from an amateur to a professional aesthetic, from the classroom as a production lab to the university as a "producing unit" (23). This transition in pedagogical principles from process to product and from interpretive historical dialogue to singular "unit" in many ways reflects the shift McConachie notes from understanding theatre as an interactive event to seeing it as a "production": it is a result of the capitalist profit motive.

The connection may be simply historical coincidence or it might be attributed to the process of objectification and commodification of acting as a craft, but this change also coincided with the establishment of Stanislavski-derived training as the foundation of professional curricula. Patti P. Gillespie and Kenneth M. Cameron point out in "The Teaching of Acting in American Colleges and Universities, 1920-1960" that acting was first established as a course offering at American universities between 1920 and 1960, and by 1960 Stanislavski was the foundation of most of those courses (61). By the time theatre programs and regional theatre were connected, "The System" and "The Method" had lost their initial changing, socially engaged, transformative and intellectual potential and had become solidified and naturalized as the accepted ideal of actor training for professional goals.

In the current state of global capitalism, the training of actors is less and less a matter of exploring an art than of selling the ability to develop "the personality that sells." Shelly Frome addresses the problems raised for actors by the increased commercialization of their "craft" in the final chapter of his history of The Actors Studio:

> As a marketing tactic, the [Actors Studio] MFA program offers graduates "an industry passport" plus a life membership in the legendary Actors Studio. The cost is $60,000 ($20,000 per year). This proposition becomes more remarkable when you consider that back in its heyday 2,000 people auditioned one year and only two were accepted: Steve McQueen and Martin Landau. Once accepted, they were members for life. No fees were attached. … And it had nothing to do with schooling or a ticket to commercial success. It was a place to get away from all that, take your time and explore acting as an art (185).

The actors of whom most people are aware (the "stars" of the film and television industry) are certainly reflections and producers of a capitalist culture – their intellectual labor as actors is far less significant than their celebrity status and conspicuous consumption. In addition, those who continue to work in live theatre on or off Broadway and hope for economic success must now compete with actors who have already achieved celebrity status in television or films (a friend who recently worked on a Broadway production agreed that big names are the only way to "make it work" financially). There is a huge pool of actors who have paid to be trained in BFA and MFA programs competing for Equity jobs at regional theatres. The current economic situation exerts a great deal of hegemonic pressure on actors to learn techniques suited to certain kinds of plays or films, to analyze plays in particular ways, to have a certain relationship to theatre and film directors, producers, agents and casting directors.

M.F.A. and B.F.A. programs are expected, then, to prepare young actors to attempt to find work in this particular professional environment, and it is certainly one in which actors seem to possess very little power, economically or otherwise. There is without a doubt an economic need to teach actors to deal with the "business" of acting, and to provide training that makes them marketable commodities. These actors have the understandable need to support themselves – to have comfortable lives – and have what I see as the admirable goal of making a living in an important profession to which they feel drawn. Although many actors may recognize that their work is significant and useful to audiences in different ways, they are ultimately forced to make compromises and, as Robert Brustein says, decide whether they want to pursue material satisfaction or "loftier goals."

The division between practice and scholarship that manifested itself early in the twentieth century has become reified even more still, and in some cases has deepened to the point of misdirected enmity between production and theory camps. In *Geographies of Learning*, Jill Dolan addresses the contemporary institutional struggle between theory and practice in theatre and performance programs I highlight here, noting that "those who teach the practical business of theater and performance – acting, directing, playwriting, speech, voice, design, movement – are often simply hostile to theory, regardless of its particular method or inflection, and privilege a more utilitarian view of knowledge in the field" (2). She argues that "it is vitally important that activists and academics, theorists and critics and more positivist scholars, find ways to interrupt our repetition of these debates and learn to work together productively" (i). In an effort to achieve such an

interruption, acting teachers might begin by noting in their courses that even when their training is Method-based and to a certain degree "utilitarian," actors are not expressing hostility to theory in any way. In fact, even when they study Stanislavski-based methods they are engaged in a significant historical debate that reflects and produces important ideas about how people live in the world.

If an alternative to utilitarian business interests is not only introduced but prioritized throughout actor training on the curricular level, perhaps eventually the strong physical/intellectual power of actors as agents of transformation might take root in a broader cultural scope. In the following chapter, I examine more closely the theoretical underpinnings of current theatre and performance studies programs and suggest that at this juncture in history, when it seems that the reluctance of actors and other theatre practitioners to venture too deeply into theoretical territory is almost necessary to their success in the professional realm, I contend that one way to empower professional actors is to reframe the relationship between performance studies and theatre studies. While it appears that systemic and economic pressures make achieving this reconception on the institutional level an uphill battle, Raymond Williams writes that "we have to revalue 'determination' towards the setting of limits and the exertion of pressure, and away from a predicted, prefigured and controlled content" (qtd in McConachie 172). I suggest how that transformation might begin to occur on the curricular level, with "actors who teach" and "scholars who act."

Chapter Two
Embodying The Multitude: Acting in a Global Economy

No major talent really becomes major talent without finding some way to speak for and with his or her own times. Is it possible that the lack of work is because we have spent too much time training our students to mirror themselves, to show the world what's inside of the artist rather than the world around the artist?

… The first thing I suggest is get your students ready for the "real real world" not the real world of how to get a job. We actually have something quite wonderful to offer these industries. In twenty years, let's try to create a new actor, an actor who is less self-conscious, less concerned about the pose of acting, and more concerned about details. As much as I critique our reliance on Stanislavski, I certainly sound like him now.

– *Anna Deavere Smith*

All of one's past – historical and evolutionary – is contained in the body. … The people we've known are no longer outside us. Until we can hear the dominant voices of those ghosts whom we contain, we cannot control, to any degree, whom we are to become. When I dream (night or day) of a particular person, it's never a photo image of that person, nor is it a disguise of the person; it is, rather, the person who has become. When we sat together, we were two. When I am alone, we are both me.

- Joseph Chaikin, The Presence of The Actor

The control of society over individuals is not conducted only through consciousness or ideology, but also in the body and with the body. For capitalist society biopolitics is what is most important, the biological, the somatic, the corporeal.

- *Michel Foucault*

Insofar as the multitude is neither an identity … nor uniform … , the internal differences of the multitude must discover the common that allows them to communicate and act together. The common we share, in fact, is not so much discovered as it is produced. … Our communication, collaboration and cooperation are not only based on the common, but they in turn produce the common in an expanding spiral relationship.

- *Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri*

Performance offers a new authenticity, based on body knowledge, on what audiences and performers share together, on what they mutually construct.

- *Dr. Joni L. Jones*

Over the past fifty years, the adoption and adaptation of Stanislavski's theories and practices of acting within the "utilitarian" camp of the institutional system of American training programs has increasingly appeared to place emphasis only on certain aspects of that training. Those few ideas have become commodified as an objective craft or science to be mastered by individual practitioners who, in turn, are responsible for using their craft to represent the lives of psychologically driven individuals in a recognizable fashion. Concurrently, some derivation of "The System" has often been represented as the most universally viable and useful technique for achieving this kind of representation, in much the same way that capitalism is touted as a globally applicable and generally desirable economic system. But despite the fact that the training itself is *sold* as an unchanging "craft," its actual practice still always involves potentially confusing and contradictory values: the belief that one must "just be" and "live the part" of an individual on stage requires close, active *interaction* with a group of other actors that belies any claim that internal psychology can be separated from external influences. At the same time, the belief that one must use the technique to serve the intentions of the playwright—a concept that appears deterministic in its view that identity and emotion are always shaped by external forces and technologies—is undermined by the inevitable presence of the actor's own subjective emotional and intellectual processes. The continual allegiance to the pursuit of "truth" is thrown into question by the presence of Diderot's paradox—that, for the actor, truth must always co-exist with a leap of imagination.

In the post-World War II economic, political and cultural climate—which was characterized by the gradual transition from internationalism to globalization, in part through the increased erasure of temporal and geographical boundaries through the use of electronic technology—citizens of the world were faced with similarly tangled philosophical questions that made an actor's task potentially even more perplexing. If identity is always determined by external economic or cultural laws or "scripts," does the individual have any agency in deciding how she or he lives? If not, what are these concepts of freedom" and "democracy" to which America is supposedly so urgently devoted? If my own identity is not shaped by a singular force but by multiple cultures and duties, how do I choose which identity to "just be?" What motivates which part of my identity I choose to represent in any given situation—material reward, responsibility to my communities, spiritual beliefs or mere personal preference? Because actors are continually struggling to negotiate such contested concepts, their processes might serve as particularly significant metaphors for living in the current global economic and cultural climate. And because their *actual bodies* are always present and clearly at stake in these processes, *live* actors are in a particularly strong position to critique the corporate elements of globalization that involve the disembodied abstraction made possible by electronic media. Actors can model the experience of inhabiting a real, flesh and blood body in a technology-based global culture.

Considering again Bruce McConachie's call for an investigation into "the relations between historical forms of theatrical expression and the dominant ideology of a historical period, and the functions of theater in reproducing, modifying, or contradicting

hegemonic relations of production" (176), one might question how provisional and physical answers to the ongoing questions of training and rehearsal—how the actor's body relates to his or her own identity, to the identity of a previously scripted character, to an audience, to truth or to imagined circumstances, and to the particular technologies with and within which an actor is working—reflect and/or resist the metaphors privileged by dominant ideology in the current historical and cultural milieu. In other words, what kinds of bodies do specific rules of training and rehearsal create, and what new kinds of physical metaphors can actors' bodies produce in training and rehearsal?

During the historic and economic transformation from modernism to postmodernism that occurred throughout the twentieth century, following the patterns of Diderot, Marx and, I would add, especially Stanislavski, The Group Theatre, et al, scholars across disciplines became increasingly more aware of and concerned with the mechanics and politics of the human body. Foucault shed light on the idea that the metaphor of the body as a machine, which gained currency in the 17th century and was essential to the development of capitalism, was combined with the idea of the body as the source of a biological life force to which people had been granted the freedom and right to protect. He suggests that together, these concepts resulted in the increased reliance on the enactment of ideology and societal regulations on and through the details of individual bodies and their daily functioning: "The setting up, in the course of the classical age, this great bipolar technology—anatomic and biological, individualizing and specifying, directed toward the performances of the body, with attention to the processes of life—characterized a power whose highest function was perhaps no longer to kill, but

to invest life through and through" (*History of Sexuality* 139). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that, through the use of electronic information systems and their integration into the daily functioning of individual human bodies, globalization has intensified this process: "In the postmodernization of the global economy, the creation of wealth tends ever more toward what we will call biopolitical production, the production of social life itself, in which the economic, the political, and the cultural increasingly overlap and invest one another" (xiii).

In general, the concept of embodied knowledge and how our physical bodies both take on and reproduce certain ideas about the world has infused theories of pedagogy and artistic practice in recent decades, especially among teachers, scholars and artists influenced by feminism and Marxism, who have as a goal the possibility of changing structures of power. Interest in and understanding of human bodies has been an ongoing project of modern and postmodern thought, and the association of physicality with knowledge is a particularly contemporary phenomenon. Historically, consciousness, "the mind," and ideas were studied separately from the body (and from emotions, as well). In *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, Antonio Damasio points out that, "Romantics placed emotion in the body and reason in the brain. Twentieth-century science left out the body, moved emotion back into the brain, but relegated it to the lower neural strata associated with ancestors whom no one worshipped" (39). He add that in the field of neuroscience, "the mind remained linked to the brain in a somewhat equivocal relationship, and the brain seemed consistently separated from the body rather than being seen as part of a complex living organism"

(40). This division is a particularly fraught issue for feminists (and, I would note, for actors), considering what Judith Butler calls "the classical association of femininity with materiality" (*Bodies* 31), and the masculinist mistrust of bodies and of matter[3], that places women in the role of the "ancestors whom no one worships," who are limited to using only the irrational, emotional "lower neural strata." In Butler's discussion of the linguistic roots of the "form" and "matter" binary, she reconfigures the feminine, maternal body as a possible source of change and generation. "This is true for Marx, as well," she writes, "when 'matter' is understood as a principle of *transformation*, presuming and inducing a future" (31). The danger in maintaining the traditional separation between body and mind (or matter and thought) is evident from Marx's theory outlined in the previous chapter: when ideas are removed from bodies they become fixed and naturalized, and changing the existing structures that privilege some categories of people over others becomes impossible. Currently, the state of theatre studies programs replicates this separation by deeming actors as the body and scholars as the mind.

In *Critical and Cultural Theory*, Dani Cavallero offers the following simple and clear explanation of the contemporary preoccupation with human bodies in a chapter examining the trends in scholarship about embodiment in the latter half of the twentieth century: "the body plays a crucial role in our interpretations of the world, our assumption

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[3] Here, Butler cites Irigaray, in a quotation that makes clear the danger of maintaining metaphors of containment with an inside and outside formulation : "Her speculative thesis is that those binaries [of form and matter], even in their reconciled mode, are part of a phallogocentric economy that produces the "feminine" as its *constitutive outside*," resulting in the ultimate erasure and devaluing of the feminine (35[emphasis mine]).

of social identities, and our acquisition of knowledge. … Experience and knowledge are inevitably embodied" (99). Because *schools* are places where consciousness, identity and physicality are constantly being re-negotiated and changed, pedagogy is a field in which an awareness of embodied ideas and performativity is particularly important. This increased awareness that meanings and ideology are carried out through bodily lived experience has led to a number of recent theories about activist pedagogy that combine critical theory and reflection with physical action and practice, in order to help students to become critical participants in culture by encouraging them to consider not only what they know, but how they embody that knowledge. In classrooms that focus on subjects traditionally considered "scholarly," such as history, philosophy or literature, this approach frequently involves activities that engage students' bodies and emotional responses in order to overcome a bias that separates intellectual work from their lives in practice.

Critical pedagogy is committed to democratic classrooms in which students and teachers actively examine the politics of the body, pleasure, emotion and desire. Educational theorist Peter McClaren wrote in the mid-1990s:

> Bodies are not placeless, monadic, isolated sites but are the result of intellectual traditions and the way such traditions have disciplined us into understanding them; yet they are also compellingly complicitous in the constitution of the metaphors through which such traditions are constructed. Hence, there is no way of avoiding bodies. As evident as this might be, the educational establishment has been exceedingly successful

> in ignoring the body both in the theorizing of educational practice and in the practice of educational theorizing. (63)

He calls for teaching "*in corpore*" that emphasizes a hope that is both embodied and informed. bell hooks cites both Paulo Friere and Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, as influences on her own teaching because each places an "emphasis on 'praxis,' –action and reflection upon the world in order to change it." She particularly admires Thich Nhat Hanh's concern with "wholeness, a union of mind, body and spirit" (14). hooks and McClaren look for ways to help students discover the various roles their physical bodies take on and reproduce in their daily lives. From the perspective of art education, Charles Garoian proposes performance art as a means of re-inserting the body into traditional art classes. He writes, "By calling attention to and acting out the effects of culture on the self through performance, the (artist's) body is transformed from being the resigned object of culture to a reflexive subject, from mere consumer to that of a critical producer" (54). Performance, for Garoian, interrupts the traditional concentration in art courses on rigid cultural rules and objects to become a way of understanding the body's role in the production of cultural categories and structures; at the same time it offers a means for students to actively critique and transform culture.

If, following these theorists and teachers, one believes that a renewed consciousness of the body and how it works (often through performance) is a means of giving students agency in producing rather than merely passively consuming their worlds, then it would seem that university theatre departments, where live bodies are already at stake and actors are in the business of manipulating their musculatures to publicly

represent identities, would be in a unique position to begin effecting some kind of change. As I emphasized in the previous chapter, Joseph Roach has observed that "conceptions of the human body drawn from physiology and psychology have dominated theories of acting from antiquity to the present. The nature of the body, its structure, its inner and outer dynamics, and its relationship to the larger world that it inhabits have been the subject of diverse speculation and debate" (11). Because both the general theoretical "Body" and the actual mechanics of individual bodies have been scrutinized more closely since the Enlightenment and especially after Marx, and because bodies are understood to be the architects and building blocks of politics, economics and culture, it would seem that the training and practices of actors' bodies when shaping (and being shaped by) fictional worlds might be thought of as increasingly significant on intellectual and practical levels. If there is a biological "truth" – even if it is nothing more than the fact of embodied engagement with the world and with ideas—an actor might have more direct access to that experience simply by virtue of asking important questions in a physical manner; to some degree considering the work they do an investigation into "the *human* experience" of having a body is a valid way of imagining it. However, as I emphasized at the end of the previous chapter, in the field of theatre training, where one might expect to find more holistic approaches to teaching, biases persist. In part as a result of economic pressures, courses are still often separated into those that are "idea-based" and encourage intellectual work, such as theatre history and dramaturgy, and practical ones that focus on developing students' bodies and emotional capacities. Even though many professors who teach history and dramaturgy are careful to engage students'

bodies in class activities, and acting courses most often do include analytic skills, the institutional structure continues to separate critical work from practical.

The division of theatre education programs into two camps—utilitarian professional theatre programs and academic history/criticism/performance studies programs—enabled artists and scholars in academic areas to question the commercialization of theatre by taking a critical stance outside of theatre practice, but this rift devalued and obscured the complexities and revolutionary promise of the questions actors on the professional track were pursuing. It also obscured the potential for repressive or exclusive practices within performance studies. As both Jill Dolan and Phillip Zarrilli have observed, institutional structures combined with a lack of self-conscious engagement of history and critical thinking in some theatre *production* courses (acting, here, in particular) serve to reinforce the "mind" vs. "body" binary. These conflicts result in the persistent separation within departments between students who are considered "practitioners" and those who are "scholars," impeding the possibility of change by, on a different level, separating consciousness and "theory" from physical action and practice. While intellectual work is not ignored in "practical" courses like acting and directing – students analyze scripts, for example, and do research on characters – the focus remains internal, directed at mastering specific techniques or tools of analysis at the expense of examining how certain attitudes and actions are historically and culturally shaped, and how the reproduction of ideology happens through the body.

In the first chapter, I historicized acting and actor training in the United States in order to reveal how the process of professionalization changed the study of acting from a

complex, intellectually and socially engaged practice to an objectified set of rules to be mastered by individual actors. In this chapter, I narrow the focus of my analysis to contemporary issues of training. I suggest supplementing the curricula in classrooms previously devoted only to developing fictional characters for performance in plays with solo performance skills and interview techniques borrowed from anthropology, history and other fields. I explain how this might be a way to encourage actors to be mindful of how their work is an important intellectual contribution to their communities that has the potential to change the way people understand and live their worlds. Because the changes I suggest come out of a belief that actor training is part of ongoing historical development, I see this as a continuation of the conversation about representing daily life into which Diderot, Stanislavski, The American Lab Theatre, The Group Theatre and the regional theatre movement entered. This conversation also included Meyerhold, Brecht, Artaud and others whose work deliberately departed from strictly realistic content and form.

Raymond Williams's chapter, "Dominant, Residual and Emergent," in *Marxism and Literature*, provides a useful framework for this concept. According to Williams, "The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present" (122). The emergent, on the other hand, is a way of describing practices resistant to dominant culture in which "new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created" (123). I imagine this training practice as an interaction of residual and emergent

processes, which, according to Williams, "are significant both in themselves and in what they reveal of the characteristics of the 'dominant'" (122). My hope is that introducing these changes that engage and adapt the residual methodological texts of past artists on a curricular level might eventually lead to emergent approaches to teaching and learning acting that stimulate larger structural changes in University and other training programs. I believe that in order to effectively critique and move past the prioritization of corporate and commercial goals, the work people are doing in theatre programs and performance studies programs has to be understood as mutually supportive rather than antithetical.

In this chapter, I suggest that, at this juncture in history, in order for actor training programs to realize their potential as important sites for investigating the relationship between global and local culture and values that reach beyond capitalism, they should adopt a metaphor for the actor's body that imitates the boundary-shifting and totalizing pattern of globalization, and at the same time acknowledges and respects difference. It should be a metaphor that reflects the definition of dialectics I cited in the previous chapter: "the method of reasoning which aims to understand things concretely in all their movement, change and interconnection, with their opposite and contradictory sides in unity." Because the work actors do always involves the *embodied* enactment of theories and ideas, their training and practices offer a place to work through the problems of separate, sovereign identities and global politics.

Bodies, while they are slippery, changing, leaking, growing entities, do have boundaries of skin and bones, that, while they function in some similar ways to each other, are also clearly very different in others. They have frames and coverings that,

while they are continually transgressed and transformed through experience, allow people to be aware of themselves as separate, individual entities. At the same time, each of our bodies is becoming more and more able to transgress its own boundaries and inhabit "the world" on a larger scale, to take on and reproduce knowledge and ideas on a global level through the same networks of technology and communication that have been used successfully to promote the spread of capitalist ideology. The specific details of being a person with a body, of laboring and interacting with other human bodies, with a desired goal in mind, and using a variety of different technologies, requires an acknowledgment of the ways in which people and their experiences are both the same and different, local and global. I am interested in finding a way for actors' training and rehearsal practices to recognize the value of maintaining a sense of individual agency and choice through defining identity as the embodiment of an ongoing engagement with community, history and imagined possibility.

My suggestion is that drawing on the historical legacy of Stanislavski's humanism might be useful in both its emphasis on learning to identify and empathize with other human beings, and in its hopeful suggestion that people are agents capable of pursuing and achieving the desires on which their survival depends; that Brecht's theories might be useful in their attempts to render actors and audiences conscious of their historical circumstances; and that Boal's work might be useful in emphasizing how the actor's rehearsal process can also make possible *choice* of how one shapes one's body into a character; solo performance techniques provide a framework for the public enactment of individual identity; and ethnographic interviewing and performance encourages

accountability to a community and the performance of multiple voices and experiences through one actor's body. All of these theorists' work can productively be synthesized and transformed within acting curricula.

Several of the theatre practitioners and theorists with whom my project is in dialogue use methods in rehearsal that do not necessarily appear in a final theatrical production. For example, Duane Krause points out that Michael Chekhov encouraged actors to work on the idea of "psychological gesture" in preparation for a role, but that how much of it was used in performance depended on the actor's "taste." Krause also writes that Stanislavskian actors are encouraged to consider the psychological complexities of their characters, but that in production these contradictions are downplayed, and that Brecht encouraged actors to use identification and empathy in rehearsal but not in performance (272). Concurrently with preparation for a play or scene but separately from regular rehearsals, I suggest that an actor comprise the identity of his or her character through a solo performance that includes interviews with various members of a community, pieces of his or her own autobiography, songs, visual representations, advertisements and other cultural artifacts or texts.

What I hope will be emergent in this practice is a renewed awareness, on the part of actors and audiences, that social structures and categories, environments, situations and *especially* individuals with desires, feelings and ideas are not created merely as the result of internal and individual processes. Identity is, in fact, multiple, and grows through embodied social interactions that happen in particular historical circumstances. Ultimately, it is this embodied interaction that makes change possible.

Acting and Metaphor Theory

Before I move on to discussing actor training and its multiple connections with the use of metaphor in culture, I want to describe a physical metaphor for the transition from classicism and neoclassicism to modernism that came up in conversation with Mary Overlie, the originator of Viewpoints training, when she did a residency at Texas A&M University where I was teaching in Spring of 2006. She and I were discussing modernism and postmodernism, and she explained to me her very physical way of understanding the historic transition to modernist thinking. Overlie said that she imagined the classical relationship of the body to space as being a vertical one: she stood with her arms pointing straight up above her head, which she tilted backward to look at the sky. This brought to mind, for me, Hegel's idea of human beings' relationship to God: they stood in this position, and their identities and thoughts and feelings entered their bodies from a source above them. People placed themselves in the same hierarchical relationship to a monarch, who was metaphorically in a position above their heads. Actors, in this conceptual framework, would take in the personalities of their characters in the same vertical position.

With the advent of modernism, the position of people's heads changed, and their gaze shifted to a horizontal one. Human beings could now look *around* themselves for the source of truth, and consequently became interested in their bodies, in their surrounding environments, and in machines. Actors could be inspired by *people*, but also by the increasingly mechanized world, for ways to mold and move their bodies in performance. However, while their heads were able to look around, people's bodies were

still, in some cases, stuck in this "up and down" hierarchical position. They might move this shape from place to place to see more things, but they were still accustomed to imagining themselves as sort of containers for spirit; in the vertical arrangement, their bodies remained individual and their boundaries stayed put. Marx understood this shift from the vertical to the horizontal, but his idea of revolution could not occur until people not only *recognized* their bodies in relationship to other bodies, but also put down their arms (so to speak) and felt the interactive movement and the various shapes their bodies made, or could make, in reciprocal connection with each other. But because people's conceptual frameworks had yet to catch up, they organized themselves in groups with protective boundaries: truth could be enclosed within the surrounding walls of *nations*, for example, and their collection of bodies mirrored the model of individual containers with protective outer walls reaching vertically to the sky.

This image of individual bodies that have been shaped by a hierarchical system but are beginning to look at the world horizontally is helpful when considering the anxiety over establishing and maintaining the boundaries of Americanism that pervaded people's consciousness in the United States after World War II. In Bruce McConachie's book *American Theater and the Culture of the Cold War: Producing and Contesting Containment***,** he analyzes post-WWII American Theatre using several experiential elements implied by the metaphor that bodies are containers with an inside, an outside, and a boundary in between them: protection from external forces, restriction of internal forces, fixity of location, accessibility or inaccessibility to observation, and transitivity (the logic stating that if, for example, an individual is within the bounds of container A,

and container A falls under the category of container B, then the individual is also within container B) (10-11). In the case of theatre, modernist movements with their separate manifestos established boundaries that separated them from other groups on the horizontal plane, in much the same way that countries were struggling to maintain their borders along geographic lines. Actors had to choose to stand within the borders of one group or another. And for performers within these containers, certain rules for acting were prioritized: some understood representation as being legitimate only if it strove to be objective, while others glorified internal, personal, subjective experience, for example.

Analyzing how people's conceptual systems help them arrange information and understand their lives is an important step in determining how to change the way actors and people move their bodies around. McConachie's writing about containment is based on the research and writings of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, some of whose work deals specifically with how metaphors both determine and are determined by the way people's bodies experience the world. In her application of embodied knowledge to theatre practice, Rhonda Blair engages the work of Antonio Damasio, another neurologist working in the field of cognitive science who has translated his work for popular audiences. Damasio's research addresses the biological roots of consciousness and describes how the body and brain, reason, emotion and imagination are part of an interactive, organic whole. The process I propose (which I describe in greater detail in later chapters) also draws its theoretical premises from the possibility that these scholars' generous translations of the dense ideas of cognitive theory might illuminate how the

work of actors and other theatre practitioners reflects contemporary scientific concepts about the body, emotion and consciousness.

Applying the models these theorists provide is a step towards changing the binary understanding of the mind and body that separates intellectual and physical work in the area of actor training and rehearsal practices. Damasio's understanding of human biology connects "behavior, intellect, emotion and imagination" (182) and points out that reason and emotion are inseparable from their interaction with the body as an entire living, breathing, changing organism. At the same time, it acknowledges that there are both innate biological and external cultural sources for human feelings, behavior and ideas; as I cited in the previous chapter, Joseph Roach wrote that Diderot's questions for the modern actor were whether the actor's body is a "spontaneously vital organism whose innate powers of feeling must somehow naturally predominate" (that is, controlled by psychological and emotional forces *inside* the body) or "a biological machine, structured by and reducible to so many physical and chemical processes, whose receptivity to reflex conditioning determines its behavior?" (161) (that is, shaped *externally* by placement in a certain environment). The theories of these contemporary neuroscientists support the concept that every actor's body is controlled by *both* sides of the paradox in dialogue with each other. Damasio acknowledges that despite infinite differences, there are also many commonalities between the way people's bodies function in the world. Consequently, as Lakoff and Johnson point out, the metaphors people use to describe their experiences in some ways "arise from the fact that we have bodies of the sort we have and that they function as they do in our physical environment" (14).

A particularly clear example of Lakoff and Johnson's theory is the "ideas as objects" metaphor, which involves the concept that "understanding is grasping." When I pick something up with my hands, it is much easier to examine it, to look at all of its details, and to control it: it is a way of understanding ideas in terms of a fundamental physical experience (20); the movement of the body when examining or holding onto a solid piece of material that does not move is a familiar one to most people across cultures. Consequently, the fundamental, biological experience from which the linguistic metaphor has been derived is physically inscribed in people's consciousness, and it becomes difficult to separate the body's memory from the linguistic use of it; one forgets that "getting" certain concepts or "acquiring" information *is not an actual physical event that happens, it is a way of describing an experience and making sense of it in terms of the body.* Biology, then, is only one facet of a complicated, moving equation that also includes how cultural experience is involved in shaping human bodies. Within capitalism, there is also the matter of consumer culture that has been discussed: objectifying knowledge becomes even more entrenched as a belief, because prioritizing the value that ideas are unmoving things makes it easier to exchange them for profit. Such is the case with acting: one never really "masters the craft," but because we make sense of the rules in a way that resonates on a basic physical level *and* is supported by the economic system in which we live, the concept seems natural.

Lakoff and Johnson acknowledge that it is difficult—even impossible—to distinguish between which metaphors are cultural or evolutionary and which are biological, since these processes are in constant dialogue with each other. The "nature vs.

nurture" question is, to some degree, beyond the point—the more important task is to uncover what a culture prioritizes by analyzing the metaphors it uses to describe experience. In *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson emphasize that the metaphoric ways people describe their experiences have a tendency to highlight particular aspects of an experience and obscure others:

> For example, in the midst of a heated argument, when we are intent on attacking our opponent's position and defending our own, we may lose sight of the cooperative aspects of arguing. Someone who is arguing with you can be viewed as giving you his time, a valuable commodity, in an effort at mutual understanding. But when we are preoccupied with the battle aspects, we often lose sight of the cooperative aspects. (10)

So what scholars *can* do is analyze how the economic and political systems in place at certain times and locations prioritize and value some elements of a system of metaphors over others, and unearth the other possible embodied concepts that have been deprioritized. In the case of "ideas as objects" metaphor, for example, one might remind people of the changing and slippery nature of thought; with acting, the effort might be to balance the individual, internal elements that have taken priority with the interactive and communicative side that tends to disappear.

Lakoff and Johnson write, "In general, the major orientations up-down, in-out, central-peripheral, active-passive, etc. seem to cut across all cultures, but which concepts are oriented which way and which orientations are most important vary from culture to culture" (24). They give as an example Trappist monastic orders. For these orders,

> … LESS IS BETTER and SMALLER IS BETTER are true with respect to material possessions, which are viewed as hindering what is important, namely, serving God. The Trappists share the mainstream value VIRTUE IS UP, though they give it the highest priority and a very different definition. MORE is still BETTER, though it applies to virtue; and status is still UP, though it is not of this world but of a higher one, the Kingdom of God. (24)

So while some experiences of the world are similar on an underlying cognitive and physical level—which direction is "up" and which is "down," for example—one might further analyze how a culture places value on those directional experiences. As suggested by the language people use to describe their experience, is "up" preferable to "down?" or is "inside" better than "outside?" If "inside" is prioritized over "outside," what elements of a culture are placed in that spot, and which are external? By extension, one might try to transform a culture's values by suggesting a shift in the metaphoric and linguistic systems in place. For example, being able to "grasp an idea" or "master a skill"—both implying ownership, control, etc.—seem to be in the "up" location in the linguistic systems of capitalist cultures. Is it possible to deprioritize "grasping" a *thing* by using language that implies movement, give-and-take, and creativity, like "stretching" or "reshaping"?

Acting, Actor Training and Cold War Politics

As I attempted to clarify in the previous chapter and earlier in this one, it was the hegemonic pressure exerted by unlimited-growth capitalism that led to the placement of

certain elements in the discussion of actor training in the "up" and "better" locations, and obscured the multifaceted nature of the investigations about "human nature" that were being conducted by Stanislavski and his followers. McConachie recognizes that images of containment are among the pervasive *capitalist* metaphors in the culture of the United States during this period, when the element of *inside* was clearly preferable to *outside*:

> If figures are perceived as containers, phenomena related to them are understood to be either inside or outside of those figures. This facet of containment affects an enormous range of everyday thinking. If, as Johnson states, "we understand categories metaphorically as containers (where a thing falls within the container or it does not), then we have the claim that everything is either P (in the category-container) or not-P (outside the container)." Thinking with containment as a matrix, in other words, results in either/or propositions that can lead to a "hardening of the categories" in everyday life. Looking at reality through the eyeglasses of containment, the phenomena of the world also seem to possess essences; one or several of the features "inside" a figure can come to represent the essence of that figure. (viii)

Throughout the cold war, any artist whose activities were thought to fall outside the protective container of "Americanism" must be a Communist: you're either with us, or you're against us.

The influence of this "inside/We" vs. "outside/Other" structure on perceptions of acting as a profession and on the ability of actors to reach beyond capitalist goals in the

environment of Cold War politics cannot be overemphasized. While Stanislavski had worked in a modernist climate that was still characterized by the sovereignty of individual nation states on which European colonialism was based, the exportation of his System of actor training and its transformation into The Method in this country coincided with a significant period of transition in the economic and cultural history of the United States and the world. Numerous smaller groups or nations were being gradually incorporated into two large containers: Capitalism or Communism. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri point out, the modernist politics of colonization and the spread of capitalism during that phase relied on the creation and extension of boundaries:

> The boundaries defined by the modern system of nation-states were fundamental to European colonialism and economic expansion: the territorial boundaries of the nation delimited the center of power from which rule was exerted over external foreign territories through a system of channels and barriers that alternately facilitated and obstructed the flows of production and circulation. Imperialism was really an extension of the sovereignty of the European nation-states beyond their own boundaries. (xii)

Following World War II, the anxiety over establishing boundaries remained, but the center of power began to shift from Europe to the United States, and the concern was with solidifying capitalism as a universal good struggling against a communist "Other"—the emphasis changed from interaction and struggle between multiple sovereign nations to a binary struggle between opposing ideological forces. While modernist metaphors of

nationalism, dominance and conquest were still ideologically prevalent, technological advances combined with increasing exchange across borders combined with "good vs. evil" rhetoric were setting the stage, so to speak, for the shift to a global economy based on subsuming difference and erasing boundaries in the name of capitalism.

The dissolution of The Group Theatre and their fragmentation into separate individual acting schools, each with its own particular approach to "The Method," is in some ways a result of their suspected communist activities and their placement outside the container of Americanism. It might be easier to extend the protective boundaries of capitalist America to incorporate each individual than it would to colonize the entire moving, changing Group. Stella Adler's FBI file, over 100 pages in length, is full of classified memoranda that detail several investigations into her daily activities throughout the 1930s, 40s and 50s, and it is clear that the inquiry continued well after it seemed evident that she was not an active member of the Communist Party. Despite the fact that it was never actually illegal to be a Communist, the hegemonic pressure of ongoing scrutiny, public opinion, and maintaining careers made the hearings and their fallout exceptionally powerful.

David Garfield points out that Elia Kazan's involvement with the House Un-American Activities Commission in the 1950s caused further strife among members of The Group Theatre. He writes,

> Kazan, at the height of his career as a film and theater director, was a prize catch for HUAC because he agreed to speak freely about his past. What upset and angered Kazan's friends and associates both in and out of the

> Studio was his naming of names in his disclosures about Communist attempts to infiltrate the Group Theatre in the mid-thirties. … on April 10, again in executive session, he presented an affidavit to the investigatory unit which included a list of one-time members of the Group's Communist cell (86).

Kazan stated that he was ambivalent about testifying, but the politics of the situation were complicated. While being questioned, he claimed that his actions were intended to make a public display of his opposition to Stalin and his tactics. In addition, facing imprisonment or blacklisting, he claimed that he did what he had to do to survive and maintain his career. Kazan's actions and their implications are revealing with regards to the later development of training actors: the HUAC and McCarthyism made evident this "either/or" proposition—in order to remain on the "inside" in Hollywood one must prove that he or she was a strong, profit-seeking individual—a capitalist. It is clear that for many artists, because of the aftermath of McCarthyism, the pressure to choose between commercial work and intellectual engagement became even more intense and loaded with significance.

Acting vs. Performance Studies

The metaphoric "insider/outsider" structure put in place by the Cold War was further solidified, on the institutional level, with the development of theatre and performance in New York in the 1960s and 70s. A number of theatre companies sprung up in resistance to Broadway and Hollywood, among them Judith Malina and Julian Beck's Living Theatre and Joseph Chaikin's Open Theatre**.** Theatres like these continued

in the dialectical spirit of The Group, investigating theories of acting across history and location and devoting themselves to the interaction of an ensemble of actors. The goals of The Living Theatre, for example, were expressly anti-commercial and they made use of the work of Artaud and Meyerhold. As Beck states in his meditations, "To get thru. To you. Our struggle is to dismantle the death machine. The death machine is capitalism. Our struggle is to open the doors of the world prison. The world prison is the social structure. Our struggle is to get thru to the possibility of being" (*Meditations* 6).

While that company was surrounded by, and in many ways entrenched in, the economics of capitalism, it struggled to keep its work from becoming commodified within that system. Beck gives an account, in *Storming the Barricades*, of the material conditions surrounding the history of the Living Theater's productions, which were filled with financial struggles, legal trouble, and moving from location to location. The relegation of these theatres that were considered to be "experimental" or "avant-garde" to a realm outside of "legitimate" professional theatre has a direct correlation to their devotion to intellectual engagement and social activism. In turn, those who made the choice not to struggle to such a degree financially and devote themselves to careers as professional actors continued to be disempowered: although they, too, were engaged in raising questions about the world and how people live in it, their status as commercial entities overshadowed their potential as intellectuals or activists.

As the Cold War persisted through the 1970s and 80s, the complicated argument between professional industry "insiders" and intellectual "outsiders" who resisted professionalization and commercial goals continued to be reflected in the institutional

structures of University programs. What Joseph Ziegler noted as an early situation in which academic programs "perpetuated anti-professional prejudices and produced graduates suited not for the profession" might also be stated in the converse: professionally oriented programs frequently took on an anti-intellectual appearance that was necessitated by the market they were attempting to feed. This institutional split was actually deepened by the circulation of the term "performance" and the development of performance studies programs in the 1970s. Joseph Roach credits Richard Schechner, whose work with The Performance Group on ensemble-based, environmental productions placed him in the experimental/outsider realm of theatre, with the "bold move" of disassociating performance and theatre within academia. (Schechner was editor of the *Tulane Drama Review*, and after moving to NYU in 1967, changed the name of the journal to its current title, *TDR: A Journal of Performance Studies* ("Three Unities" 33-34). While it was indebted to theatre practice in many ways, "performance" attempted to escape the limitations of the discipline out of which it grew and took a deliberate stance outside the margins of traditional (and increasingly professionalized) theatre practice. While Schechner was always a scholar and his work as a theatre practitioner was "experimental" rather than "professional," his background was solidly in theatre studies and he was part of the faculty of New York University's theatre department. But as his collaboration with anthropologist Victor Turner became more involved, the interdisciplinary Performance Studies program became a separate entity.

While both programs are currently housed in Tisch School of the Arts' Institute for the Performing Arts, the graduate program offering an MFA in acting and the

Performance Studies program, which offers the MA and PhD degrees, are listed separately, one devoted to professional training, the other to academic inquiry. This current division, in some ways, limits both realms, and its consequences are varied. Performance studies becomes less connected to the work of *actors* as performers. In his book *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, Marvin Carlson admits that although his background is in theatre "I will not be devoting a great deal of attention to traditional theatre as such, but rather to that variety of activities currently being presented for audiences under the general title of 'performance' or 'performance art'"(2). Stephen Bottoms writes that "Thanks to its similarly transgressive claims, performance art has become a favored stomping ground for Performance Studies, but most forms of theatre tend to be studiously avoided, as if they represent merely the discarded skin from a previous, less efficacious life" (175). In this sense, actors seem and, perhaps, feel more and more powerless in a social sense because their investigations (which do involve engagement across disciplines: they study cultural trends, history, literature, etc.) are eventually interrupted by the need for a commitment to commercial goals.

Postmodern Critiques of Actor Training

The cultural metaphors that dominate institutions also pervade the understanding of how bodies, identities and desire work, and analyzing how the containment metaphor privileges certain views of identity and the body clarifies why The Method's association with professional programs appears so insidious and ripe for critique. McConachie points out that Strasberg's Method-based exercises, especially, imply that the body is a container for individual identity:

> Strasberg's most notable exercises took for granted the existence of an essential self, less conscious but more genuine than the mask worn on the outside for public display. Affective memory, for example, assumed that past memories locked within held the essential truth about a person's identity. And the "private moment" exercise encouraged performers to withdraw from the ongoing work of a rehearsal to engage in an activity normally performed in private as a means of ensuring that their emotions were owing from an authentic center. In short, for Strasberg, the "inner emotional experience" of every actor was the contained core of his or her being as an artist. … In Strasberg's conception, actor, character, and play were like three Chinese boxes resting inside of each other: the inner self of the actor nested inside the character she or he was playing, which, in turn, was contained by the largest box of the three, the fictional world of the play. (89-90)

Because the establishment of American interpretations of Stanislavski-based methods like Strasberg's as the default in professional actor training programs in the United States happened in an ideological climate that privileged metaphors of protecting individual and national sovereignty and conquering and controlling an "Other" in the interest of commerce, the training itself may seem intended to promote a view of the body that reproduces such ideas. Taking on the identity of a character whose body is not like one's own, for example, may appear to be an attempt to extend the boundaries of one's own body as a means of "mastering" or "controlling" the identity of another. The need to do

this in a particularly believable manner, encouraging empathy and emotional connection in an audience while masking any element of choice or discrimination, seems intended to manipulate audience members and win them over to a dominant understanding of truth that serves the interests of groups already in power.

Not only did American adaptations of Stanislavski's System seem to promote a kind of individualist and colonialist use of the actor's body, they also claimed to be always applicable to any theatrical problem. Such claims to universality made the process even more suspect to people wishing to dismantle the tools for spreading the dominant ideology of capitalism. Following the fall of the Berlin wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the extension of multinational corporate power throughout the world used the guise of an American nationalism that made rhetorical claims to universality, freedom, justice and peace. Because The Method's theoretical foundations, especially in light of its association with professional actors who sought work in the increasingly commercial markets of film and television, took on the appearance of supporting and reproducing the dominant truths of global capitalism, it was ripe for critical and deconstructive analysis. In the environment of global capitalism—which Hardt and Negri suggest has involved an ideological shift from an emphasis on nationalism and international struggle to the illusion of a lack of boundaries, a lack of difference, and a lack of history—"the productivity of bodies and the value of affect are absolutely central. … the productivity of the corporeal, the somatic, is an extremely important element in the contemporary networks of biopolitical production" (30). The motives of any cultural

practice associated with commercial interests, especially one that deals with "humanity" and emotion, become even more dubious.

While there may have been some questioning of Method techniques in academic programs connected with colleges or Universities, many professional acting coaches and private, commercially-oriented schools embraced Stanislavski-based approaches without any kind of deliberate and public critical engagement. David Krasner writes that, particularly when it is associated with Strasberg,

> Method acting has enjoyed its greatest success outside of academia. Within universities, method acting has fallen into disfavor. Despite its popularity among actors, in university theatre departments "Method bashing" is vogue. Method acting practices, including *motivation, justification, personalization, affective memory, believability, authenticity, subtext, organic behavior,* and *subjectivity*, have come under considerable criticism (6).

Although I agree with Krasner that there has been a tendency to question "The Method" as such, most university programs that are *professionally* oriented still immerse students in some variation of the practices he outlines. The scholarship directly addressing the complex problems of actor training that was so closely associated with realism came most clearly out of departments and companies expressly termed "experimental theatre," theatre programs outside of the United States, and theatre history programs devoted primarily to academic writing rather than theatre practice per se. In the growing postmodern field of performance studies, dominant actor training practices were

critiqued, while solo performance and other theories of acting were promoted as viable alternatives. Postmodern opposition, which often relied on the assertion of difference, relativity, and the negotiation of boundaries based on race, class, gender, sexual practice, etc., asserted a stance *outside of* and *against* dominant claims to universal truth. These scholars' focus, because they deliberately wrote from a position external to the commercial concept of American acting, necessarily took a narrow approach to Method-based training, singling out certain elements of it that seemed ethically questionable.

For example, Philip Zarrilli, who was chair of the Asian/Experimental Theatre Program at the University of Wisconsin/Madison until 1998, states in his introduction to *Acting (Re)Considered* that the valorization of honesty, believability and the "organic" naturalizes certain ideas of appropriate behavior and forces the actor to reproduce categories of identity without consciousness of their historical and social basis (9) .Colin Counsell, a lecturer in English Literature and Theatre Studies at the University of North London, is mindful of intellectual developments that actors who continue to embrace Stanislavski's focus on the "humanist or bourgeois individual" ignore. He writes that in sociology, Marxism, Feminism and Post-Structuralism, "behavior is shaped by forces acting *upon* the human subject's consciousness," while in Stanislavskian methods, people are "desiring machines, constantly in pursuit of their own aims, their actions dictated by forces within their psyches, so that the sole author of human action, consciously or subconsciously, is the individual self" (39). Counsell also examines The Method as it is associated with Strasberg, noting that

> This conception of the psyche—an inner essence stifled by the outer, its impulses repressed by social conditioning—has little in common with Stanislavski's, but it is one that has long held a privileged place in American culture. Historically, most of the discourses and ideologies that have dominated American thought have been without a substantial social-determinist component, a thoroughgoing conception of the subject as *constructed*—not merely repressed—by social environment. Political discourse of both Left and Right, for example, tends to gravitate about concepts of liberty and individualism, not the remodeling of social structures, but the *escape* from them, into a realization of one's natural self. (62)

In Zarrilli's critique, the *actor's* agency and self is diminished by the methods traditionally used in this country, forcing him or her to represent an identity that potentially reinforces oppressive social mechanisms rather than questioning them. In Counsell's analysis, the problem with "believability" is the illusion that *characters* (and actors, and by extension, people in general) have the option to choose to live outside of ideology. In post-structuralist and feminist criticisms of Stanislavski-based methods, then, the question of agency in how one shapes one's body is a central issue of debate. Actors are seen, in one way or another, to reproduce an understanding of bodies as protective containers for human individuals who shape their own, perhaps complex, but largely consistent desires and identities.

According to these critiques, the actor's or character's consciousness within realism takes on the illusion of being something separable from the material circumstances in which his or her body is placed. This illusion, especially when combined with the emotional identification and expression required to "move" audiences, is thought to make it impossible for actors and their audiences to be conscious of the forces outside of the individual that influence his or her behavior, and also make it difficult to imagine new possibilities for action. Interestingly, these particular critiques in some ways run counter to the materialist reading of Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theatre's work on Chekhov I proposed in the previous chapter: in those plays, the characters may be full of desire, but audiences can see that their individual identities are shaped by social necessity and their wishes are forever frustrated by the fact that their destinies are determined elsewhere. This external, deterministic dramatic structure is naturalized in commodified professional productions, and the system of exchange takes away both the actor's (and character's) agency. The audience is also inactive in the Moscow Art Theatre context, intended to be a group who passively observes this recognizable and objectified form. The various deconstructive and analytic readings of Stanislavski-based acting in the context of realism clarify how difficult the task of producing clear philosophical understandings of actor training is, and the importance of historical context and purpose to understanding how effective training and rehearsal practices can be as a means of social critique. Most postmodern criticisms themselves stop just short of suggesting how a shift in the internal vs. external idea of the body's relationship to identity might be achieved.

The major contribution of people who have proposed alternative methods to Stanislavski's work is a deliberate consciousness of history and material circumstances rather than internal focus on the individual: training actors and audiences to take the step of having consciousness of how their bodies reproduce ideology is essential if people are to see the true possibility of *choosing* how their bodies live out their worlds. Several feminist and post-structuralist critics of Stanislavski-derived methods have proposed Brecht's theories and practices as possible alternatives for actors who wish to resist conventional training and focus on Marxian concepts of historicity and consciousness. Interestingly, Brecht did not see his own theory as being entirely contradictory to Stanislavski's—he understood its main difference as having the test in the public's opinion rather than in the actor's internal mechanisms:

> The alienation effect does not in any way demand an unnatural way of acting. It has nothing whatever to do with ordinary stylization. On the contrary, the achievement of an A-effect absolutely depends on lightness and naturalness of performance. But when an actor checks the truth of his performance (a necessary operation, which Stanislavski is much concerned with in his system) he is not just thrown back on his 'natural sensibilities,' but can always be corrected by a comparison with reality (is that how an angry man really speaks? Is that how an offended man sits down?) and so from outside, by other people. He acts in such a way that nearly every sentence could be followed by a verdict of the audience and

> virtually every gesture is submitted for the public's approval. (*On Theatre* 95)

Elin Diamond writes that an actor using Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt* in performance "'quotes' or demonstrates the character's behavior instead of identifying with it. Brecht theorizes that if the performer remains outside the character's feelings, the audience may also, and thus freely analyze and form opinions about the play's 'fable.'" She also points out that by challenging the idea that an actor must physically resemble the character she is playing, *verfremdungseffekt* makes possible a critique of gender performance (45). Diamond's reading of the Brechtian "not/but" offers one way of encouraging actors to maintain and demonstrate consciousness of what they are representing, allowing space for commentary on a character within performance and demystifying the relationship between actor and character. However, in Brecht's formulation, the actor and audience still appear as individuals whose consciousness is capable of remaining outside of the body in order to comment on an objectified (and therefore reified, in Marxian terms) character. In addition, scholars and performers who use Brecht in this way often understand his process as one that resists empathy: the implication is that focusing on emotional and physical identification (a significant step in the conventional methods described above) is a detriment to consciousness and thought. The understanding of the body still maintains rigid boundaries between inside and outside, and also distinguishes between the processes of thinking and feeling.

Other theorists who have used Brecht maintain a mistrust of Aristotelian empathy and emotion, assuming that it is a detriment to the audience's consciousness of social

determinism. Augusto Boal, for example, critiques elements of Aristotle's poetics within bourgeois theatre that requires the audience to "leave their brains with their hats upon entering the theatre" (104). He acknowledges a debt to Brecht, whose work, he says, gives the spectator "the right to think for himself, often in opposition to the character" (122), awakening critical consciousness. In both forms, the audience's relationship to character is the same as that of actor to character—empathic or conscious. The crucial difference in Boal's poetics of the oppressed is the inversion of the actor/playwright/audience relationship; the spectators become not only actors but also playwrights: their choice defines the action of the play being performed. Boal is hopeful in his call for popular agency when it comes to both awareness and change.

He gives a clear account of how workers' bodies are formed by the tasks they are required to repeat in order to survive, pointing out that a typist's musculature is shaped by sitting bent over at a desk using arms and fingers, while a watchman's body becomes attuned to constant walking. Like Marx, Boal sees the possibility of change as relying on heightening these workers' *consciousness* of their own physical alienation. He writes about "exercises designed with the objective of making each person aware of his [sic] own body, of his bodily possibilities, and of deformations suffered because of the type of work he performs" and theorizes that through this awareness people can learn to re-manipulate their muscles in different ways (127-28). Boal's theory comes the closest to proposing methods to develop new physical metaphors for larger groups of people, but his work also reinforces the metaphor of containment. They may be shaped externally by labor they are required to perform, but spectators have *within them* the power to choose

differently and escape the forces that trap them in these patterns. In addition, Boal understands his work as outside of bourgeois ideology: “In opposition to that theatre, another must rise: one determined by a new class and which will dissent not only stylistically but in a much more radical manner” (79).

Postmodern Thinking and Globalization

While the Cold War emphasized the inside/outside structure and experimental theatre/ Performance Studies claimed outsider status, the philosophical trends percolating “within” the “outsider” containers were embracing ideas that seemed the opposite of bourgeois humanism: scholarship and performance within these programs took on one or all of the following concerns— difference (especially in resistance to dominant identity categories), hybridity, border-crossing, surface rather than depth, simulation rather than authenticity, bodies as objects of culture and subjectivity as a function of history, movement and change rather than rigid structure, and the group rather than the individual. Marvin Carlson, in his book *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, studies the wide-ranging development of the term, and acknowledges its status as a “contested” concept that has involved the application of theatrical terms, theories and practices to many academic disciplines in different ways (1-2). Performance art, which might be seen as a postmodern extension of the experimental or avant-garde theatre companies of the 1960s and early 70s, was defined by Roselee Goldberg as “a permissive, open-ended medium with endless variables, executed by artists impatient with the limitations of more established forms, and determined to take their art directly to the public” (9). It is clear

that this kind of intellectual pursuit was informed by Marxian thinking, and its impulse was antithetical to the reification that seemed to be required by capitalist goals.

A resistant form that became a significant branch of performance in the 1990s was the one-person show that included personal narrative; while it may have reinforced the capitalist focus on the individual, it opposed the idea of sameness and the assumption that being American meant fitting into dominant identity categories. In her introduction to the collection of solo performance texts entitled *Extreme Exposure*, Jo Bonney writes that

> For better or worse, this century has been the era of the "self"—a hundred years of shifting from the 19th century emphasis on community to the late twentieth-century elevation and examination of the individual. Solo performance, in its naked presentation of a single person(a), is very much a product and reflection of a century that has given rise to the hedonism of the twenties, the radical individualism and activism of the sixties and the so-called "me decade" of the eighties. The nineties finally made room for the previously marginalized, diverse voices of this society, and the solo form has tracked these developments. (xiv)

While performers like Spalding Gray, who as a straight white man from financially comfortable east coast stock fell within some normative identity markers, the form itself raised questions about identity and performativity: "Gray, particularly at the beginning of his solo career, had no public image. Through the process of exposing his private self in performance, Gray actually created a public self as a role to assume with an audience. His

creation of an identity through the performance act has intrigued critics and audiences alike" (151). Solo performers falling outside of dominant categories who used similar techniques to craft public personae embodied the struggle involved in claiming subjectivity when one does not fall properly within the category of "American." Kristin Langellier points out that "the *personal* in personal narrative implies a performative struggle for agency rather than the expressive act of a pre-existing, autonomous, fixed, unified or stable self which serves as the origin or accomplishment of experience" (129). Robbie McCaulie's series of performances called *Confessions of a Working Class Black Woman* "are intended to 'bear witness to racism' and to enact the contradictions of living in a racist America, which disavows the centrality of black people to American history from its very beginnings" (*Extreme Exposure* 248). Holly Hughes, Tim Miller, John Fleck and Karen Finley are now famous in their efforts to assert identity and personhood because their famous court battle over the loss of their NEA funding and association with "indecency" marked them as "outsiders" and "un-American."

Critical opposition to Stanislavski-based training that followed postmodern paths of thinking achieved certain crucial successes—overcoming the potential lack of tolerance for difference in American forms that presented themselves as authentic, for example —but its possibilities for suggesting alternatives to multinational *corporate* motives were limited by the tendency of consumer capitalism to absorb and sell back all attempts at resistance, as well as by its own exclusive insider/outsider tendencies. Stephen Bottoms, in fact, genders and sexualizes the Theatre/Performance Studies dichotomy, presenting a compelling argument that the characterization of performance as

more “virile,” real and efficacious than the more entertaining, commercial and “fake” is based on homophobic anxiety about theatricality in general. He writes that “the various critical debates that, in the 1960s, performed the linguistic and conceptual divorce of theatre and theatricality from performance and performativity are of far more than just historical interest. We are still living with these binary distinctions, and with their related dynamics of potent virility vs. showy sterility” (181).

In fact, despite its theoretical dedication to inclusion, movement, transformation and flexibility, Performance Studies in many ways failed to completely escape the emphasis on individual accomplishment and the reification of its goals that were functions of its placement in a capitalist economy. Its very existence was necessitated by a University system that maintains a metaphoric emphasis on professionalism vs. scholarship or utilitarian vs. academic study. And like Method acting is associated with Strasberg or The System with Stanislavski, Performance Studies is often represented as the brainchild of Richard Schechner. In a sense, what Bottoms calls the “various critical debates” provide the “given circumstances” for the rift, and it was Schechner’s objective to carry out the “bold move” that completed the divorce. While he was part of a larger historical conversation, Schechner is often spoken of as having been the agent most responsible for the separation of performance studies from theatre departments. Carlson writes that “no theatre theorist has been more instrumental in developing modern performance theory nor in exploring the relationship between practical and theoretical work in theatre research and in social science research than Richard Schechner” (21). Although its goals may have included social engagement, dialogue and change rather

than financial profit, the methodological strategies of Performance Studies were also similar to those of capitalist development.

While in many ways suggestive of new metaphors, the flexibility and inclusiveness characteristic of interdisciplinary postmodern art forms hoping to question dominant capitalist ideology actually fed the strategies for globalization. In *Postmodernism*, Fredric Jameson noted that postmodern cultural practices were more engaged in a critical effort simply to *comprehend* the new patterns of communication and exchange that were shaping the world than they were with changing them. "We do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace," he writes, "in part because our perceptual habits were formed in that older kind of space I have called the space of high modernism" (1967). While attempts to understand the new methods of transferring knowledge were necessary, they failed to propose viable, creative alternatives to rampant consumerism: "We have seen that there is a way in which postmodernism replicates or reproduces—reinforces—the logic of consumer capitalism; the more significant question is whether there is also a way in which it resists that logic" (Jameson 1974). Joseph Roach clarifies that the flexibility of performance was easily contrasted with the perceived stability of theatre, but also that its open-endedness made it far more viable as a resistant academic discipline within the boundaries of a postmodern intellectual climate. He writes, "If *performance* is a fundamentally contested term, then it is also an extraordinarily opportunistic one, skating rings around other, more rigid concepts as they take their spills on the slippery surfaces of postmodern culture" (34). The need to assert itself in resistance to theatre per se excluded more traditional actors

even if they were interested in using Stanislavskian methods of training for purposes other than commercial ones; while it was *internally* producing different possibilities, performance studies indirectly reinforced the cultural image of an insulated group with established boundaries.

Producing The Multitude

In some ways, the energy required to resist the culture of capitalism by staking a claim outside of it legitimates that system, reifies its dominance, and reinforces the conceptual structure that makes practices of exclusion and inequality possible. In their book *Empire*, Antonio Hardt and Michael Negri point out that resistant practices to the global spread of capitalism have often "relied on a standpoint outside these effects of globalization, a standpoint of life and truth that could oppose the informational colonization of being" (34). As an example of what they call a subaltern nation" within the United States, they choose the Black Nationalist movement in the 1960s:

> In the case of black nationalism too, however, the progressive elements are accompanied inevitably by their reactionary shadows. The repressive forces of nation and people feed off the self-valorization of the community and destroy its multiplicity. When black nationalism poses the uniformity and homogeneity of the African American people as its basis (eclipsing class differences, for example) or when it designates one segment of the community (such as African American men) as de facto representatives of the whole, the profound ambiguity of subaltern nationalism's progressive functions emerges as clearly as ever. Precisely the structures that play a

> defensive role with respect to the outside—in the interest of furthering the power, autonomy, and unity of the community—are the same that play an oppressive role internally, negating the multiplicity of the community itself. (108).

They also argue that the progressive functions of movements like Black Nationalism often exist when they are in the imaginations of revolutionaries, in the activities they pursue prior to being named, "that is, when the imagined nation does not (yet) exist." Labeling themselves as "outsiders," then, in some ways reinforces the structural boundaries that make resistance ineffectual.

Hardt and Negri's concept of Empire has been contested by many leftist critics since the book's publication in 2000 on various grounds, including their readings of Marx, their idea that imperialist politics have been replaced by a new Empire represented by America and their nebulous concept of Multitude as a global resistant force (which was clarified in their more recent book *Multitude*) (http://www.marxist.com/Theory/review_toni_negri_empire.html). However, I believe that they offer compelling reasons for the ultimate failure of activist organizations in the 1960s and 70s. Echoing Althusser, they remind readers that, because of the increased ability of technology to produce consumer desire within the bodies of individual people, the spread of capitalism relies as much on a rhetoric of multinational *inclusion* and incorporation as it does on the *conquest* and *control* of geographic territories and entire groups of people (i.e. Other "nations"):

> Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a *decentered* and *deterritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers. Empire manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command. The distinct national colors of the imperialist map of the world have merged and blended in the imperial global rainbow (xiii).

In other words, capitalism has not only continued to use the exclusive and repressive language and strategies of nationalism, it has *also* adopted some of the boundary-blurring properties that make progressive movements particularly successful before they have named themselves. Therefore, while past strategies have "relied on a standpoint outside these effects of globalization" (34) Hardt and Negri suggest that an external standpoint based on anti-globalization is no longer viable.[4]

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[4] This is an example that came well after the publication of Hardt and Negri's book, but it is one that I think explains these concepts more clearly. During the Christmas season in 2005, right wing media personality Bill O'Reilly made a public statement that the increasing practice for retailers to wish patrons "Happy Holidays" rather than "Merry Christmas" was insulting to Christians. O'Reilly's function is to preserve the illusion of a unified America based on certain religious and moral principles, and his rhetoric is therefore nationalist. Some retailers heeded his call, but most did not, stating that their goal was not to promote or reject any religious belief, but to reach more customers. Their inclusiveness and pleasant wishes seem encouraging and kind, but their goal is monetary. One might challenge O'Reilly's America by saying, "I am a non-Christian, and therefore I will do my Christmas shopping only at stores that use inclusive language." But the result is still supportive of the commercialization of Christmas, and doesn't address the moral or practical details of differing belief systems or question the very premise of shopping and its relation to spirituality. How might non-Christian groups demonstrate the strength of purpose required to protect themselves against Bill O'Reilly's nationalist

While they admire and applaud the efforts of current leftist activism that focuses on the "localization of struggles," they warn against re-establishing a glorification of the boundaries of local identities—the exclusionary premise on which modernist colonial activities were based. The live and local quality of theatre always places actors and audiences in specific times and places, and might be understood to automatically hold a position outside of globalization; the natural boundaries of actors' bodies, as well, combined with the internal focus of commodified versions of Method training can take on the illusion of celebrating the idea of individual sovereign identities in a way that is reflective of nationalism; solo autobiographical performance can also be read in this way. But this premise implies an understanding of the body that suggests that its shape and movement and behavior can somehow escape being affected by technology and globalization, and furthermore a philosophy that identity can be separate from the body and its interaction with the surrounding environment.

While Hardt and Negri acknowledge the significance of the "deconstructive and critical" approach to resistance, they also call for a different kind of activism that echoes Jill Dolan's call for "reanimated humanism"—what they call an "ethico-political" constructive strategy. In their more recent book, *Multitude*, they describe this strategy more clearly:

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language, but also advocate the respect for difference that is the spirit of "Happy Holidays?" How does one acknowledge and embrace the humanity and goodwill in that statement and contest its value as a marketing tool?

> You might say, simplifying a great deal, that there are two faces to globalization. On one face, Empire spreads globally its network of hierarchies and divisions that maintain order through new mechanisms of control and constant conflict. Globalization, however, is also the creation of new circuits of cooperation and collaboration that stretch across nations and continents and allow and unlimited number of encounters. This second face of globalization is not a matter of everyone in the world becoming the same; rather it provides the possibility that, while remaining different, we discover the commonality that enables us to communicate and act together. The multitude too might thus be conceived as a network: an open and expansive network in which all differences can be expressed freely and equally, a network that provides the means of encounter so we can work and live in common (xiv).

What I find missing in their argument is a recognition that, while the extension of Empire does rely on the production of ideology on and through individual bodies and their interaction, the *truly* new thing that has made possible the elimination of boundaries and the illusion of *sameness* is a kind of murderous colonization that is actually a reversal of the focus on the body initiated during the Enlightenment. The development of mass communications technology that has erased the barriers of geography also relies on the appearance of a lack of *actual bodies*: global capitalism, while it desperately needs human bodies and their desires for its survival, has thrived on the illusion that people and their bodies no longer matter. Commerce can happen on a global scale because, in a

virtual world, it is easier to believe that *real, live bodies do not exist*. And, as Marx stated, when ideas are disembodied they become mystified and objectified commodities, and "the sum total of [people's] own labor is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor" (320). The supposedly universal good of disembodied multinational corporate values has continued to be spread through mass communication systems, resulting in a pre-Enlightenment understanding of static idealism that ignores the actual experiences of pain or suffering or pleasure on which the spread of capitalism depends.

The misguided assumption is also that the technologies through which concepts of the world are carried into all corners of the globe—Internet, television, film, computer gaming, etc.— must shape and control people's bodies rather than the other way around. Again, we are back to Marx's argument with Hegel: social systems that are abstracted from people's bodies are easily mystified, reified, and continually controlled by a small, powerful group who holds much of the world's wealth. What Hardt and Negri seem to call for is a "counter-Empire" that is global and local at once, based on common values that reach beyond commerce. What is required is a strategic production of subjectivity, feelings, and ideas that involves a negotiation of global ideals and technologies and the generative power of desire; but which also deals with the daily facts, experiences and values of real human bodies. This sounds a lot like acting.

Acting and "Reanimated Humanism"

The pedagogical model I propose is a practical, active, constructive application of Jill Dolan's theory of reanimated or reconstructed humanism that is "multiple, respecting

the complexities and ambiguities of identity while it works out ways for people to share and feel things in common, like the need for survival and for love, for compassion and for hope" (22). Rhonda Blair's re-examination of Stanislavski in light of new understandings of the body and consciousness in the field of neuroscience and cognitive theory is useful here. She cites Damasio's writings, noting that unlike former models of biology and psychology, Damasio's work "connects behavior, intellect, emotion and imagination" (182). Three of his main premises are essential to Blair's argument: first, that "emotion is integral to the processes of reasoning and decision making, for worse and for better" (41); second, that the brain (and therefore both reason and emotion) is inseparable from its interaction with the entire organism of a body; and third, that the body (and thus the brain and consciousness) is constantly being transformed by its interactions with objects in the surrounding environment: "the organism is involved in relating to some object, and … the object in the relation causes a change in the organism" (20); this change begins with a feeling and results in behavior. Blair postulates that Stanislavskian actors reflect Damasio's "organism/object" interaction: "The actor engages the internal (mental) and external objects of the text and its given circumstances, and her own mental objects (derived from memory and personal history); she then accordingly devises a pattern of behavior" (183). If one includes among the "objects" with which an actor relates the bodies of other people – other actors, audience members, people with whom she has interacted and who live in her memory – the actor's (and character's) consciousness and courses of action are transformed by identification with people outside of her. In this case, thought, empathy and emotion are interactive elements of identity formation and the

determination of behavior rather than simply a means of reinforcing ideas of what is normal or believable.

Elin Diamond's reading of Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* provides a compelling psychological basis for developing an acting process that echoes Damasio's work, incorporating Stanislavskian identification with Brechtian consciousness and historicity. She writes,

> We are continually taking in objects we desire, continually identifying with or imitating these objects, *and continually being transformed by them*. In other words, identification in Freud always works both ways: it is an assimilative or appropriative act, making the other the same as me or me the same as the other, but at the same time it causes the I/ego to be transformed by the other. What this suggests is that the borders of identity, the wholeness and consistency of identity, is transgressed by every act of identification. (396)

Diamond also suggests that, "Though identification seems to promote the annihilation of difference—and thus violence to the other—it may also suggest the problematizing of models that support such violence. … Rather than upholding the social status quo, identification might be seen as producing historical contradiction" (390-91). The rehearsal and training process with which I have been experimenting proposes that actors can model this kind of identity formation by developing a character through a separate performance script that incorporates interviews with community members, pieces of text from the play being performed, and other cultural and historical "objects" that might

shape a character's body, consciousness and behavior. Applying this theory in training and practice allows actors to show ways in which identity is created through multiple historical identifications—that people are changed, to one degree or another, by the people they've known, and carry on their bodies physical traces of others with whom they've interacted—rather than modeling an idea of identity as consistent and unified. It also gives actors and the communities with whom they work agency in what is being represented on stage through allowing them to choose together the multiple and potentially contradictory objects that shape the character being performed.

I particularly appreciate the term "reanimation" and the fact that it conjures metaphoric images of a beautiful sort of Frankenstein's monster of an actor. The practice of quilting is another metaphor that uses the concept of reanimating a residual piece of fabric within a newly arranged whole. In her essay "Quilting: A Feminist Metaphor for Scientific Inquiry," Maura Flannery argues that employing quilting as a metaphor may be a useful way to re-imagine science and scientific research. She examines the implications of using what she sees as a feminine-associated metaphor as an alternative to the male-identified images of hunting, conquering, colonization and wrestling. This emphasis on difference is of great importance in quilting, as Flannery writes about when discussing the many uses of that practice as a metaphor in literature, history and cultural studies. She states that Elsa Barkley Brown used the idea of an African American strip quilt to talk about black women's history: it is "made of scraps without any overarching design but with an aesthetic appeal deriving from its rhythms and lively diversity" (630). Flannery talks about the small, detailed, work of science and quilting, and, although it isn't done in

silence the way these things are, the difficult work of creating accurate physical and vocal reproductions of a community is equally as specific and tactile. She writes,

> Both endeavors involve a great deal of what the chemist and philosopher Michael Polanyi (1962) called tacit knowledge: learning that cannot be put into words, that can only be acquired by doing. Someone can explain how to focus a microscope, but you'll never master this skill without doing it yourself repeatedly until you've gotten a feel for it. In quilting, a feel for the fabric can mean anything from knowing how different colors will look next to one another to learning how much a particular fabric can be stretched to fit (634).

It is compelling that Richard Boleslavsky's advice to the young actor or "creature" in his chapter on characterization in *Acting: The First Six Lessons* describes just such a process. "The Creature" asks, when finding subjects to examine when constructing a character, "Can I study and interpret just one picture or can I use different ones?" He replies,

> Not only different ones, but living, contemporary personalities as well, in the whole or in the part. You can borrow a head from Botticelli, a posture from Van Dyck, use the arms of your sister and the wrists of Agnes Enters (the last not as a dancer but as a person). The clouds driven by the wind can inspire your walk. And all of this will make a composite creature, just as a tabloid makes a composite photograph of a person or event from a dozen different photographs (88).

My interest is in developing a way, through understanding the body, consciousness and identity as being constantly transformed by interactions with other people and other elements of history and culture, to think of training methods as other texts an actor puts together to create a "composite creature." I want actors to retain the useful elements of Stanislavski-derived training (desire, empathy, and identification), while also being conscious (in a Brechtian way) of the degree to which a character's attributes (and an actor's choices regarding them) are constructed socially and culturally.

Oral History and Performance Ethnography

In the introduction to *Voices of a People's History of the United States*, Howard Zinn writes of the importance of choice in representations of history. His interest, in that book, is in giving vocal agency to misrepresented or underrepresented identities, and I propose that one might also replace the term "historian" with "actor" in the following quote:

> … I knew that a historian (or a journalist, or anyone telling a story) was forced to choose, from an infinite number of facts, what to present, what to omit. … there is no such thing as a pure fact, innocent of interpretation. Behind every fact presented to the world—by a teacher, a writer, anyone—is a judgment. The judgment that has been made is that this fact is important, and that other facts are not important and so they are omitted from the presentation.

This model of actor training involves the collection of personal narrative testimony, which is used by some scholars in public history and anthropology to give the authorship

and interpretation of history and culture back to larger communities; it is employed as a means of giving people a way to participate in representations of the experiences that have shaped their identities. Paul Thompson writes that because it is a cooperative process, oral history reconfigures the relationship between history and community: ”Historical information need not be taken away from the community for interpretation and presentation by the professional historian. Through oral history the community can, and should, be given the confidence to write its own history” (17). He also points out that students working on oral history projects find “that the people whom they interview do not fit easily into the social types presented by the preliminary reading. … Above all, they are brought back from the grand patterns of written history to the awkwardly individual human lives which are its basis” (12).

The body of literature on oral history and ethnographic research methods is equally as substantial as that on actor training. Some of the work theorizing postmodern ethnographic research in anthropology deals with borrowing performance techniques from theatre as embodied alternatives to qualitative writing. Using performance is intended to give researchers a richer empathic experience of the cultures they are observing, and to emphasize ethnographic research as a processual dialogue rather than a practice of observation and knowledge. In their essay “Performing Ethnography,” Victor and Edith Turner write of their pedagogical experiments using performance and ethnography together, and propose an “instructional form [that] could be a kind of synthesis between an anthropological seminar and a postmodern theatrical workshop” (48). Although one of the experimental workshops they conducted took place with drama

students at New York University, this article focuses closely on their use of dramatic performance as a means of teaching about ritual to Anthropology students at the University of Virginia. My interest is in the value of "re-borrowing" theatrical techniques, examining them through the performance work that has been done in the field of anthropology.

Because it adds the step of *embodying* the Others whose stories one is collecting, performance ethnography offers ways for actors to be conscious of how bodies are shaped by historical and cultural interactions with other people; how psychological and emotional impulses might be a result of multiple physical interactions rather than only the workings of an individual mind; and how taking onto one's body the words and gestures of other people makes possible deep experiential and emotional empathy. Dwight Conquergood writes that, "Ethnography's distinctive research method, participant-observation fieldwork, privileges the body as a site of knowing" and that it "represents a shift from monologue to dialogue, from information to communication" (15, 17). Joni L. Jones discusses the various elements of ethnographic work that uses performance as a means of "bodily understanding," which departs in many ways from the "body as container" metaphor discussed above: creating a context for a performance that centers around questions or ideas (rather than following rigid rules of representing a location with specific boundaries); remaining accountable to the community and taking representational ethics into consideration (giving a community of people the power to intervene in how they are represented); acknowledging the presence of the performer's own subjectivity (rather than giving the illusion of objective reportage); emphasizing

multivocality, or shifting and sometimes contradictory perspectives; and participation (or encouraging interaction with audiences rather than maintaining an "insider/outsider" relationship between actor and audience) (8-10). Anna Deavere Smith and others who make use of ethnographic research in performance collect interviews with people in certain communities, and perform, on their own bodies, the words, gestures, vocal patterns and emotional responses of their interviewees (as exactly as possible) in order to engage in an embodied dialogue about culture, experience, and identity. Taking into account ethical concerns about appropriating the words and experiences of other people, performance ethnography also involves the step of inviting interviewees to witness and comment on the process of representing their bodies and stories. As Jones suggests, "Performance offers a new authenticity, based on body knowledge, on what audiences and performers share together, on what they mutually construct" (14).

Because Deavere Smith herself is an actor, playwright, and teacher of theatre, and because she theorizes her own work as a response to psychologically-based "self-oriented" training, she is particularly important to this project. Debby Thompson reads Deavere-Smith's approach as a Brechtian and poststructuralist alternative to acting rooted in Stanislavski-based training because of its focus on the difference between the actor and the character she is performing, because of its premise that identity is always shifting and being negotiated, and because of its focus on community rather than the individual (5). My interest is not only in seeing her work as Brechtian, and therefore conscious, in impulse, but also in its potential for re-imagining empathy and emotion. She writes that, "Even as the actor has the potential to be the other, *all others*, the tension between the

self and the other is real," but that "The effort to cross that bridge is the drama, and it should not be denied" (*House Arrest* xviii). The act of attempting to travel across the bridge results in a visceral kind of empathy and understanding:

> I became increasingly convinced that the activity of reenactment could tell us as much, if not more, about another individual than the process of learning about the other by using the self as a frame of reference. … Learning about the other by being the other requires the use of all aspects of memory, the memory of the body, mind, and heart, as well as the words. (*Fires* xxvii)

Here, Deavere Smith's words have interesting resonances with Damasio's model of how the body and consciousness work together and Diamond's theories of identity formation: transformation of the body and consciousness are continually occurring as an actor and the "others" with whom s/he works interact.

Lakoff and Johnson describe such an approach to culture as an "experientialist" view:

> From the experientialist perspective, truth depends on understanding, which emerges from functioning in the world. It is through such understanding that the experientialist alternative meets the objectivist's need for an account of truth. It is through the coherent structuring of experience that the experientialist alternative satisfies the subjectivist's need for personal meaning and significance. … What [subjectivism and objectivism] both miss … is an interactionally based and creative

> understanding. … From the experientialist perspective, metaphor is a matter of *imaginative rationality*. … New metaphors are capable of creating new understandings and, therefore, new realities (235).

I propose that actively including oral history interviewing and the ethnographic performance techniques used by anthropologists and historians and adopted by Anna Deavere Smith and other solo performers is a way of understanding the actor's process as an "experientialist" rather than merely subjective or objective practice. The holistic understanding of the human body promoted by cognitive theorists seems a particularly useful way to illuminate how an actor's body in rehearsal and performance involves a changing, developing *negotiation* of boundaries: it is both inside and outside, individual and collective, subjective and objective, productive and reflective, imaginative, emotional and rational, global and local. Rather than understanding the goal of "human"-ness and hybridity as the *elimination of* difference, boundaries and history, I argue that incorporating solo performance and ethnographic interviewing into acting classes is a step toward developing training and rehearsal processes which suggest that being an actor in a global environment requires a deep *engagement with* and examination of those ideas.

Imagination and Transformation

In the following two chapters, I describe two case studies in which I worked with students on researching how the step of creating a community-based and intertextual performance as part of the rehearsal process can also make possible *choice* of how one shapes one's body into a character; and how the element of incorporating multiple embodied conversations that do not fit easily into social types broadens the possibilities

from which an actor can choose when shaping the identity of a character. This project is concerned not only with making the representation of characters more responsible to community and concerned with empathizing directly with specific people, but also with the prospect that live theatre, as an event that involves the interaction of bodies that carry knowledge and ideas, is a way of transforming the world and introducing new possibilities for living in it. I am interested in the idea that, at this point in history, actors are in a unique position to perform both the "real" and the "possible" *at the same time*. Because all representation (and transformation) requires a leap of imagination; that an actor can choose to include among the many physical texts s/he uses when creating a character *imagined* ones in addition to those that come from interactions with real people; and that enacting a character that is a combination of numerous real and imagined texts within the framework of a scripted, fictional play is a way of representing how bodies and ideas work together to shape identities and create worlds.

The recent cultural interest in "reality" television, documentary film, and personal narrative in live performance, and the continued interest not only in realism in theatre, but also in plays like *The Laramie Project*, *The Vagina Monologues* and *The Exonerated* that are built from interviews with real people[5], betrays a fascination with witnessing "true"

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[5] This is another area of research that might be pursued in connection with this process. There is a practical reason for including oral history interviewing techniques and ethnographic performance strategies in "professional" acting classes because of the current trend toward this kind of play. But *how* these techniques are introduced is important: students should put together their own projects with an interest in ethics and dialogue rather than simply accurate depiction, in order to raise awareness of their responsibility to the speakers in this kind of work.

experience. However, Rhonda Blair points out that Damasio includes *imagination* among the elements of consciousness (in addition to emotion and reason) that are essential to an organism's survival and ability to envision courses of action that effect its well-being (183). Similarly, Joseph Chaikin writes that people are drawn to theatre by a "discomfort with the limitations of life as it is lived, so we try to alter it through a model form. We present what we think is possible in society according to what is possible in the imagination. When the theater is limited to the socially possible, it is confined by the same forces which limit society" (23).

My interest is in how the meaning of "documentary"- style ethnographic performance changes and expands when combined with the leaps of imagination and possibility required to enter the fictional world of a scripted play. In order to perform the people an actor interviews, his or her body must *imagine* itself as the body of an Other, attempting to represent a "real" situation. At the same time, in a scripted play, the "given circumstances" of the imagined world are fictional inventions: an actor's body can show how people can take their real physical circumstances, combine them with new and imagined worlds, and transform their bodies into something different. As Anna Deavere Smith writes in her preface to *House Arrest* and *Piano*, "When the actor makes the future present for us, we can react to the possibility of a future. When we are confronted with both the past and the future, we may become energized to reimagine and adjust our present" (xvi-xvii). If the process through which this happens involves an interactive, embodied, and sometimes contradictory conversation rather than an internal, individual,

and mystified method of representing a consistent identity, actors can at once explore existing social situations and suggest how to live out new, imagined ones.

Chapter 3
"I Wish I Could Put It All Inside My Body": Democratizing Identity in Charles L. Mee's *The Trojan Women: A Love Story*

Why was this done? This is beyond knowing. I pray that I could pull it all inside my body all the murder all the cruelty the ruin the fire the wounds broken limbs bleeding children my city bring it all deep inside me so that I could understand.

- *Hecuba, from Act I of The Trojan Women: A Love Story*

My plays are containers in which I put the stuff of my life: my relationships, what I've been reading, what I've seen on television, what people have said to me on the street. But yes, I do a certain amount of research.

- Charles L. Mee, Jr (www.amrep.org/people/mee1.html)

I think civilization and individual human lives are in a constant process of being made and remade, so it seems to me good if plays are done the same way. I do think that first the culture shapes who we are and then we take in the material from our lives and write something or paint something or compose a piece of music or whatever it is and what comes out has gone through the filter of a unique psyche, so it comes out unique also … So it's this kind of wonderfully paradoxical creation that's both a product of the culture and of some individual's sensibility. But the tendency to choose that

it's either one or the other is probably an oversimplification.

-Charles L. Mee, Jr. (www.community-newspapers.com /archives/ rosegardenresident/20031204/stepout_profile.html)

As The Group Theatre understood not only the content and form of the plays they produced but also their company's structure and methodology as a "training ground for citizenship," I suggest that the relationship among theatre practitioners and between them and their audiences can be understood as a model for identity formation and communication, as well. And I believe that theatre artists of all political persuasions with any kind of goal, commercial or social, have devoted more than enough time and energy to thinking about and enacting external conflicts, resistance and battle. The dramaturgy of realist plays and the analysis actors undertake when working on those plays is generally based on the conflicting desires of individual characters; activist theatre companies in the 1960s questioned this realist dramaturgy, and in doing so took a stand *resisting* its supposedly dominant commercial bent; the structure of many theatre training programs is plagued by a perceived battle between commercially driven media and scholars motivated by intellectual debates. This is not to say that I think conflict and resistance are unimportant; in fact, I agree that disagreement and difference are absolutely necessary and vital. But because of the years devoted to repeatedly performing conflict, actors' consciousness will be sufficiently haunted by its spectre for years to come.

If it can be assumed that difference (with or without the implication of conflict) is a given, then, I am interested in how actors can be encouraged to actively produce "the common" with their bodies. How might theatre artists and audiences perform empathy

and commonality without capitulating to the idea that "everyone is the same" – an ethic that has historically been used to colonize Others and subsume them into capitalism? One way to begin inventing inclusiveness and cooperation is through transforming the containment metaphor that encourages an "insider vs. outsider" mentality. While I don't believe that the concept of identity can or should be laid aside completely, I am interested in finding a theory of actor training that adjusts the lens from a conception of the body as a container for identity, the body as an individual nation conquering and colonizing all that it encounters, or the body as a machine made purely for consumption, to a quilt-like "experientialist" metaphor reflective of Hardt and Negri's concept of "the Multitude." This framework allows for the possibility that human identities are ongoing processes of consumption *and* production: systems of desire, empathy, interaction and experience that are at once individual and multiple, reflective and expressive, real and imaginary, subject and object, the same and different.

My interest is in beginning to introduce these changes on a small scale, within individual projects or courses, hoping that experimentation with these metaphoric shifts on that level will inspire larger transformations. Eventually, maybe, this new experiential and interactive rehearsal process can travel through networks of communication and be reflected in larger institutional structures like universities or professional theatres. For example, one of the goals of both case studies I describe was to find ways to generate commonality between the strategies and techniques of Performance Studies and the methods of Theatre Studies instead of continuing to reproduce the idea that each field exists within a separate container with strict boundaries. While Bruce McConachie calls

for scholars to examine whether production practices in theatre serve to *support* or *resist* hegemonic relations of power, it seems to me that all practices can potentially be understood to do both. The more pressing project, for the sake of this dissertation, is to engage in acts of productive or transformative, rather than merely deconstructive, criticism: what priorities can actors deliberately emphasize through the metaphors they embody in their work? In this chapter, I use a production of Charles Mee's *The Trojan Women: A Love Story* at The University of Texas in October 2003 as a case study to describe how this process of training and rehearsal was inspired by Mee's plays *in performance*, and theorize how this particular methodology gestures towards a reconciliation of "theatre" and "performance" that (if put into use and developed further) might provide a way to integrate theories of embodied, progressive pedagogy into actor training at this point in history[6].

I was very fortunate to have been chosen to direct this production because, as a PhD student and someone who was interested in a somewhat unconventional rehearsal process (as opposed to an MFA directing student or a visiting guest director who already had a great deal of professional experience), I was not on the list of people who would normally be considered for the job. Because of its experimental nature and because of my limited experience as a director, the project was deemed a "workshop production," which

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[6] It only very recently came to my attention that a new book on Mee's work with Anne Bogart and the SITI Company by Scott Cummings, entitled *ReMaking American Theatre: Charles Mee, Anne Bogart and The SITI Company* was published in July of 2006, as part of the Cambridge Studies in American Theatre and Drama series. I have not included this book, which uses the company's production *bobrauschenbergamerica* as a case study, in my bibliography because I was unable to locate a copy before the deadline.

essentially meant that we were given a very limited budget compared to other selections in the department's season. We had no money for set design and construction nor were we assigned a set designer, but were given a limited amount of funding for costumes and lighting, and designers for both of those elements were assigned to the production team. Our position as both "outside" and "inside" the standard production season proved to be both a blessing and a curse. It was a blessing because we were forced to be inventive when considering the setting for the play, and the focus was necessarily on the actors and the process rather than the spectacle of a full production. We had license to make atypical and bold choices (the lighting designer's advisor, for example, encouraged her to experiment as much as she wanted and to be as dramatic and unconventional as she dared, which resulted in beautifully rich choices); because we were officially billed as part of the regular season, we received the use of the B. Iden Payne Theater for rehearsals, and were given the same publicity as the rest of the season. At the same time, we were limited to one weekend for the final production, and a mere four performances seemed far too few for the intensive time and effort that we devoted to rehearsals. Regardless of the marginal status we had, my role as both PhD student and director seemed a step in the direction of changing the insider/outsider structure of our department.

As another way of eliminating the boundary between performance studies and theatre, I was interested in combining research and training methods from "both sides of the tracks" in one main stage production. One significant way that this approach addresses postmodern critiques of acting and actor training is through the understanding

that any method of training is, in Raymond Williams' terms, one among many residual and emergent texts at play in rehearsal and performance. That is, one common postmodern critique of Stanislavski-based or Method-related training is the objectivist principle that those tools are universally applicable to any character or any type of text. I would contend that the kind of analysis that involves objectives, obstacles and actions within the given circumstances of a play certainly *may* be applied to any play in any historical context, but the meanings it creates are detailed and particular in addition to "universal" and "human." New and different meanings emerge in each situation in combination with enduring ones. Toward this end, I discuss how Mee's playwriting technique works together with the theories of acting we put into practice in rehearsal: solo performance compositions, Anna Deavere Smith's process of creating performances through enacting collected interviews on her own body, Stanislavski-based theories that rely on individual desire, will and action, and Viewpoints training that emphasizes the relationship of the actor's body to space and time.

In this chapter, I also read the specific combination of intertexts used in Mee's play *The Trojan Women: A Love Story* together with the historical and material conditions of this particular production, the choices we made in rehearsal, and the texts collected by the actors through solo "character study" performances based on interviews conducted with outside members of their communities. I describe how this process, as an embodied collection of texts filtered through the interests, discussions and desires of individual actors and community members, reaches toward a "reanimated humanist" or "experientialist" approach to actor training. While I don't suggest that this workshop

production was effective on all levels, I believe that the questions it raised regarding subjective experience and objective truth, individual identity and collective interaction, reality and the imagination, and technology and the human body provide an illuminating guide for understanding how actors can serve as a strong public intellectual presence in their communities.

Performance Studies, Jameson and Mee

In performance, Charles Mee's plays serve as both an example of the Jamesonian "postmodern condition" in art, and as an answer to the problematic image-based and ahistorical tendencies of work that typically falls under that category. Viewing Mee's work through the history of Marxist aesthetics clarifies the possibility that, when peopled with actors' bodies, *The Trojan Women* provides a particularly rich example of Marxian praxis at this juncture in history: it shows how theatricality and "the real," artistic imagination and historical memory, intellectual engagement and physical enactment must exist in dialogue with one another across history and within a particular time and place in order for history to progress. As I suggest in the previous chapter, while Stephen Bottoms' argument is compelling and the rift between Performance Studies and Theatre Studies may be the result of gendered and sexualized presumptions about efficacy, potency and "the real" in performance, the development of Performance Studies as an academic discipline might also be understood as a necessary extension of the historical circumstances of the Cold War. That is, the existence of Performance Studies might reproduce the insider vs. outsider structure, but the work done by critics and intellectuals *outside* of dominant culture *at that time* paved the way for the kind of hybrid of theatre

studies and performance studies evident in Charles Mee's work. Postmodern thinking, as I suggested in the previous chapter, took the necessary step of engaging with and understanding the new processes of communication made possible by technology. The next step is to determine how to make use of this global system in a way that prioritizes values other than economic growth and individual property.

By the time Fredric Jameson was writing, in the mid-1970s, the world was in the beginning stages of fully saturated "global" or "multinational" capitalism. In a sense, everything had become commodified, and, consequently, Jameson names the two most prominent features of postmodernism as being, "the transformation of reality into images," and "the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents" (*Postmodernism* 1974), in which human subjects no longer understand their orientation to each other or to the world and are constantly bombarded with a series of simulated and objectified images. "We do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace," Jameson writes, "in part because our perceptual habits were formed in that older kind of space I have called the space of high modernism" (1967). If Marx was right in stating that "as individuals express their life, so they are" (*German Ideology* 150), postmodern art that rose out of the conditions of global capitalism, "can itself stand as they symbol and analog of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects" (*Postmodernism* 1971). In other words, modernist subjects were still standing with their arms in the air, looking around them in confusion as they attempted to assess where to

stand in relationship to the world as a whole: as they were trying to choose which container suited them best the protective boundaries of the containers were constantly shifting and dissolving. As a result of his own entrenchment in this world and of his place in an intellectual climate that includes the constant interaction of semiotics, feminism, poststructuralism, and other theoretical frameworks, Jameson's aesthetic critical work focuses on constantly historicizing works of art as symbolic acts.

Translated into terms related to acting, Jameson's theory might be stated as follows: rather than an actor being the subject of a sentence and a character the object he or she creates, or rather than the spectator being the subject who looks at an objectified actor who has become reified as a character, the actor, character and audience are in a constantly moving relationship with each other, and the play's meaning changes according to the detailed historical context of its production. In a sense, this is exactly what Marx was discussing when he called for a revelation of the "movement behind the forging"—the emphasis is on change within historical circumstances rather than the creation of solid objects of representation. But within postmodernism, the movement appears to be only among the commodified images themselves—soup cans and pop stars and typified consumers with money to spend— turning to postmodern subject into merely another disembodied, simulated sign to be shifted around at the mercy of an immense and uncontrollable ideological system. In this state, the possibility of change and resistance to capitalism in postmodern art is left in question by Jameson: "We have seen that there is a way in which postmodernism replicates or reproduces—reinforces—the logic of

consumer capitalism; the more significant question is whether there is also a way in which it resists that logic" (1974).

Charles Mee's postmodern plays might be examined to answer Jameson's question: Mee's "remaking project" is a website on which he publishes his plays free of charge. On the site, Mee writes that he does not compose explicitly political plays, but echoes Althusser's deterministic concept of subjectivity and ideology with the belief that human beings are social creatures that "often express our histories and cultures in ways even we are not conscious of, that the culture speaks through us, grabs us and throws us to the ground" (http://www.charlesmee.com/html/charlesMee.html). Kara Reilly compares Mee's work to Lyotard's critique of history, which "exposed the dramaturgical structure involved in the writing of history, a teleological structure implying that history is headed toward some unseen progress that is part and parcel of the Enlightenment project" (1). In order to avoid the modernist trappings of realism with its focus on cause-and-effect progressive narrative, individualism and originality, Mee cuts up and juxtaposes borrowed texts from various sources. In the "hypertext" framework of this website, his plays take the form of completely disembodied images, reflecting a Jamesonian view that the still-modernist subject is confronted, in postmodern art, with only images of history and left to piece them together in different ways: "in a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 1965). Mee himself is a product of capitalism (his work is funded by wealthy patrons), and his plays clearly grow out of and reflect, formally, the late capitalist mode of

production. But where is the potential for resistance, the struggle?

Embodied Hypertext

As made clear by Foucault's concept of biopower cited in the previous chapter, "The control of society over individuals is not conducted only through consciousness or ideology, but also in the body and with the body." Mee's own metaphor for how culture shapes identity implies both that culture has its own physical body: it "grabs" us and "throws us to the ground," but also that *we* are the surrogate bodies (the *actors*, more specifically) of culture. In addition to his opinion that, "The decline of theatre as an essential art form in America coincides with the triumph of naturalism and the well-made play—which is boring people crazy out of their minds," ("Shattered" 100), it is because of Mee's own *physical* experience in the world that his plays defy the dramaturgy of realism and remain open ended and startling. Tidy packages are illusions, but living in the world requires a bodily experience that defies easy explanation. In an online interview with Pacific Resident Theatre Company, he explains his proclivity for inconsistencies and ambiguities that complicate the world for audience members rather than clean reconciliations:

> … he elaborated on his preference for making disjointed plays full of unmediated sharp edges and "juxtapositions where you're startled by the suddenness of life." Then, in a moment of candor, without a scintilla of self-pity, he explained why: "When I was 15, I had polio. Suddenly, without any motivation or aspiration on my part, my entire life was transformed, really in a millisecond. So my experience of life is that it is

> not a smooth, orderly progress of events that is best understood by some unifying theory. And I tend to project that persona story on to a perception of the world itself. To me, those astonishing juxtapositions are how life feels. That feels true." (http://www.aldrichpr.com/Reviews_000.htm)

Mee's resistance to middle class realism is not borne entirely out of a deliberate "outsider's" relationship of opposition; rather it is experiential. He uses his own body's experience of reality and truth as the formal source for his representations. This extends to the casting of actors in the play: "There is not a single role in any one of my plays that must be played by a physically intact white person. And directors should go very far out of their way to avoid creating the bizarre, artificial world of all intact white people, a world that no longer exists where I live, in casting my plays" (http://www.charlesmee.com/html/cast.html). His view challenges the idea of physical sameness and smoothness perpetuated by the spread of capitalism and the rhetoric of American ideology, even as it makes use of the same global networks of communication and acknowledges that the body is in many ways the object of culture.

In some ways, the view that bodies are the hope for revolutionary art in the current global, technology-saturated economic and political climate seems to be a return to orthodox Marxism, awakening people to the idea that *physical* social being is what builds a world. But it is, as well, a product of the process of history after Marx, of the questions raised by all of the theorists and artists in dialogue with him. If control is enacted more and more on and through people's individual bodies, then potential for resistance also relies on rediscovering those bodies' possibility for willful and conscious

physical action. This is why Mee's plays are compelling to me as sources of hope within the sea of disembodied sameness that is postmodern consumer culture and as pedagogical tools for actors who wish to make waves in that sea. The plays exist as abstracted images and words on the internet; but in the act of reading the words, with their undeniable focus on bodies, it becomes very clear what is missing from the equation. Since these chunks of text are put together as *plays*, and like all dramatic forms, they find their fullest realization when they are peopled by human bodies. The power to complete them and fill them with movement and life lies with the *bodies of actors*. He also encourages visitors to his website to build performances in exactly the way he has created them: by taking the bits and pieces and recontextualizing them into a new work. Mee's plays in actual production, with live audiences, provide a compellingly Marxian form: embodied subjects in conversation with pieces of all kinds of history, being moved by these objects, but also consciously moving them around to shape a new world.

In addition, Mee's work is a practical realization of Williams' theory of the residual, emergent and dominant. While I agree with Kara Reilly that Mee's plays avoid a teleological and progressive view of history, the canonical texts on which many of the "master narratives" of European and American drama are traditionally based have not been discarded: Greek plays provide the structure for many of his works. *The Trojan Women: A Love Story*, for example, is a contemporary adaptation based on Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, Berlioz's masterpiece opera *Les Troyennes*, and the story of Dido and Aeneas from Virgil's *Aenead*. Mee's method in writing this work involved filling the

structure of a Greek tragedy with texts from a number of diverse, mostly contemporary, sources. He writes of *The Trojan Women,*

> This piece was developed—with Greg Gunter as dramaturg—the way Max Ernst made his Fatagaga pieces at the end of World War I: incorporating shards of our
> contemporary world, to lie, as in a bed of ruins, within the frame of the classical
> world. It incorporates, also, texts by the survivors of Hiroshima and of the Holocaust, by Slavenka Drakulic, Zlatko Dizdarevic, Georges Bataille, Sei Shonagon, Elaine Scarry, Hannah Arendt, the Kama Sutra, Amy Vanderbilt, and the Geraldo show (http://www.panix.com/~meejr/html/trojan.html).

The result of this method of writing is a web of texts that comment on and collide with each other, but which make meaning because they are contained within the single body of this play. When composing *Les Troyens*, Berlioz himself worked in a similar way: "It represented the convergence of a multiplicity of influences, literary and musical. On the literary side Berlioz ascribed a major part to Shakespeare's influence in addition to that of Virgil. On the musical side the major influences were those of Gluck and Spontini." The way Shakespeare wrote, in fact, was not different—he recontextualized ancient stories and mythology, mixing them with contemporary language and situations. On the most recent update of Mee's website, the plays are divided much like Shakespeare's are: tragedies, comedies/romances, etc.

Mee includes among the texts with which he works in general, "history, philosophy, insanity, inattention, distractedness, judicial theory, sudden violent passion, lyricism, the National Enquirer, nostalgia, longing, aspiration, literary criticism, anguish, confusion, inability"— (http://www.charlesmee.com/html/charlesMee.html). It is notable that every text is given equal weight in Mee's work; there appears to be no hierarchy separating the Greeks from The National Enquirer, and emotions— "anguish, confusion, inability" are no less significant as pieces of the puzzle than intellectual ideas such as history or philosophy. In production, I might add, the body becomes another of these many pieces, as do the individual identities of actors and audience members, the methods of training used, and – in the rehearsal process we attempted – the identities of other members of the community.

The Trojan Women and the context of war

After September 11, 2001, the repercussions of the violent and insidious politics of Empire were becoming increasingly evident. The possibility of including Mee's *The Trojan Women: A Love Story* in the 2003-04 production season came up at a meeting in early 2003, at which students were invited to make suggestions of plays that might be of interest to the department. When my friend and colleague Shannon Baley recommended a feminist re-telling of Euripides' play, I mentioned that Charles Mee had written a contemporary adaptation of *The Trojan Women* that would be timely and an interesting challenge for student actors. After the meeting I re-read the play, and decided that if it was chosen for the season I would put myself forth as a possible director: I was very interested in the play because of its intense focus on both effects of history and war on

people's bodies and the possibility of imagining new arrangements of power through embodiment.

In the introduction to his translation of Euripides' *Trojan Women*, Nicholas Rudall writes, "One year before the performance of the Trojan Women, Athens had invaded the [neutral] island of Melos.... Athenian forces captured the island, put its men to death, and enslaved its women and children.....We are thrust into the presence of the pain of innocent victims of war" (3). Through placing other texts within the framework of Euripides' play and Berlioz's *Les Troyens*, Mee's play brings this story into conversation with other historical moments in which people were subjected to pain and death at the hands of foreign invaders. Performing this play in October 2003 extended that conversation to include the current state of the world, and the play's structure and methods seemed all the more relevant and important in the context of the techniques, strategies and reasons given for "Operation Iraqi Freedom," which had just begun.

The possibility of producing this play came at a time when the United States was clearly using strategies of both physical destruction/domination and media driven image saturation for the purpose spreading capitalism. It seemed increasingly important to be able to distinguish the facts of what was really happening in the world from the groundless, disembodied images with which we were being bombarded daily, and at the same time it had become increasingly more and more difficult to find the distinction between reality and image. Ten years ago, in September 1996, Harlan Ullman and James Wade, Jr. of the National Defense University published a report entitled *Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance*. The purpose of Ullman and Wade's research was to

theorize appropriate changes in military tactics for a post-cold war global economy, in which, according to them, the United States was in a position of military dominance with no "external danger from a 'peer competitor'" (viii). The report was the product of an intellectual engagement with theories of warfare that was undertaken to address the need to shrink the size of the military and to keep up with increasing technological capabilities and win the "information war" that characterized the onset of the 21st century. Reading this report, it occurred to me that acting or theatre in the 21st century might be thought of as the opposite face of the military: rather than controlling and producing bodies and information with a framework prioritizing destruction, domination and control, theatre might use the same networks of production and exchange to encourage difference, engagement, conversation and community.

The writers of *Shock and Awe* were interested in making use of the time in which the U.S. was not actively involved in military combat to determine how its enemies might be planning to undermine its current position of dominance and counter any potential strategies. The language of a "revolution" in military tactics pervades the report, which is careful to emphasize the inclusion of the "psychological and intangible," as well as the standard military tactic of physically overwhelming and destroying the enemy's military:

> "Dominance" means the ability to affect and dominate an adversary's will both physically and psychologically. Physical dominance includes the ability to destroy, disarm, disrupt, neutralize and render impotent. Psychological dominance means the ability to destroy, defeat, and neuter the will of an adversary to resist; or convince an adversary to accept our

> terms short of using force. The target is the adversary's will, perception and understanding. The principal mechanism for achieving this dominance is through imposing sufficient conditions of "Shock and Awe" on the adversary to convince or compel it to accept our strategic aims and military objectives. *Clearly, deception, confusion, misinformation and disinformation, perhaps in massive amounts, must be employed*. [emphasis mine] (xiv)

A number of things stand out about this report in the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11. First, when used by an opponent, psychologically damaging military techniques involving deception and manipulation are deemed terrorism. When used by the U.S. in its initial attacks on Iraq in March of 2003, they are termed "Shock and Awe." CBS news reported on plans for the second Iraq war as follows: "The battle plan is based on a concept developed at the National Defense University. It's called "Shock and Awe" and it focuses on the psychological destruction of the enemy's will to fight rather than the physical destruction of his military forces" (http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/01/24/eveningnews/main537928.shtml). Interestingly, the techniques and strategies of contemporary warfare employed by the United States military owe their development to the existence of "think tanks" created to determine strategies for change—a process completely opposite in outcome but similar in strategy to that of the Frankfurt school of Marxists who advocated intellectual critical reflection on cultural practices as much outside of the realm of capitalist production as possible in order to determine future possibilities for transforming that system.

The report is also compelling because while it does not deny that the ultimate goal of the military is still *physical* destruction to achieve control, it acknowledges the increasing necessity of manipulating knowledge, psychology, and the understanding and *imaginations* of one's opponents in order to maintain dominance. September 11 itself might be understood as a symbolic act that made use of just such a "Shock and Awe" strategy: the *idea* of America's global dominance was strategically pinpointed through tactical physical attacks on the centers of international finance and the United States' military presence across the world; the attacks overwhelmed the entire population psychologically and emotionally through the spread of images of the attacks through electronic media. In retaliation, after fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan, the U.S. entered into Operation Iraqi Freedom with the alleged intention of continuing to fight the "War on Terror" through deposing Saddam Hussein and destroying Iraq's (fictional) stockpile of weapons of mass destruction. The President's statement on the day military operations began in Iraq was that

> The danger is clear: using chemical, biological or, one day, nuclear weapons, obtained with the help of Iraq, the terrorists could fulfill their stated ambitions and kill thousands or hundreds of thousands of innocent people in our country, or any other. … The United States and other nations did nothing to deserve or invite this threat. But we will do everything to defeat it. Instead of drifting along toward tragedy, we will set a course toward safety. Before the day of horror can come, before it is too late to

act, this danger will be removed.

(http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030317-7.html)

So while the academic and production sides of theatre departments maintained a sometimes antagonistic theoretical separation between scholarship and practice during the same period, people in the business of warfare recognized the need for critical reflection on historical and technological advances. "War Colleges" worked together with the administration and the military to figure out how to manipulate information and take action in the future to maintain a position of dominance. Their goal of dominance remained the same and might be considered "eternal" or "universal," but strategies of war must clearly adapt and adjust. The war continues to this day, more than three years after President Bush prematurely declared "mission accomplished" and announced that major combat operations had ended, and well after it became evident that the weapons of mass destruction that were in danger of falling into the hands of "the terrorists" were an imagined *fiction*, perhaps part of the "massive disinformation" required by this new technique of warfare. In a sense, the performativity of the military—its ability to produce the conditions that necessitate and enact its own destructive and repressive existence—has been far more effective than the production of utopian *communitas* Jill Dolan suggests can happen in the theatre. When we began rehearsals for the play in September 2003, the president had announced the need for $87 billion dollars to cover the costs of increasing violence and to step up attempts at restoration: all this supposedly in the name of democracy. By the time the play was performed in late October, the U.N. Security

Council had approved a resolution for Iraqi restoration that involved occupation by an international force led by the United States, despite the initial resistance of some nations.

Pointedly at this time in history, *The Trojan Women: A Love Story* asks the question, "what happens now?" and makes evident the real aftermath of war: to the extent that war has in some ways become about spectacle and image and symbolic acts and even deception, the real consequences are that actual bodies have suffered and continue to suffer horrific consequences because of it. In the shadow of the image-saturated world that led to September 11 and the ensuing war in Iraq, in which it had become difficult to distinguish between convenient fictions and reality, people began to recognize the importance of re-examining truth and how to find it. To me, Mee's play reaches for the possible truths of the experience of war through invoking bodies. It is about what happens to people's bodies as a consequence of being placed in particular historical circumstances: about the *physical* and spiritual importance of being human, about war, violence, death, love and sex, and what happens to people as consequences of those things. It is also about how the physical effects of these circumstances shape identities and choices of action, while people also struggle to gain power over their own bodies and exert agency to change the circumstances in which they are acting. The first act is about the real damage done to people's bodies and psyches by war and colonization, and the second act asks whether or not the pleasures of bodies in love can redeem past harms and restore hope. The fact of having a body is also what compels me about acting in theatre: what happens when the live bodies of actors and audience members come together in one place? How can actors recognize the need for more praxis-based strategies to produce a

life that has love and pleasure for all people as a priority rather than money and power for a select few? How can we examine questions about reality and imagination and make use of networks of communication in order to *preserve* and *enjoy* bodies, to make life more equitable and comfortable for them rather than destroying or repressing them?

The dramaturgy of Mee's play reflects this same question, especially in the form of Queen Hecuba's journey. From the beginning of Mee's adaptation, Queen Hecuba's concern is with understanding, empathy and diplomacy. She continually asks the question "Why was this done?" and insists more than once on stopping the war and ceasing the horror that has befallen her city. She seems particularly concerned with experiencing the pain of war through her body, and evokes the tension between media imagery and real suffering that is significant to this production:

> When the television works one can see the dead bodies in the streets no one has dared to retrieve … This is beyond knowing. I pray that I could pull it all inside my body/ all the murder/ all the cruelty/ the ruin/ the fire/ the wounds/ broken limbs/ bleeding children/ my city/ bring it all deep inside me so that I could understand.
> (http://www.panix.com/~meejr/html/trojan.html)

There is a sense here that image alone is not sufficient to understand suffering and destruction—Hecuba prays to be a kind of an actor, inviting the embodiment of others' pain in order to make an effort to empathize with it and understand—one issue that marked the importance of producing this play at this time, and through using the process we did. At the beginning of the act, she is emblematic of a stereotypically feminine or feminist characteristic: that of nurturing and compassion; hers is a worldview advocating increased understanding, accepting difference and maintaining peace—she wishes to stop the destruction of life. In a sense (although Stephen Bottoms represents performance studies as being more masculinized) at the beginning Hecuba's philosophy is more akin to the flexible, border-crossing mindset of postmodern thinking.

At the same time, Queen Hecuba makes the clearest transition in the play, and by the end has taken on what are typically thought of as more masculine and nationalist traits. Sarah Bryant-Bertail writes that, "In a *gestus* that defines the whole performance, Hecuba the victim becomes the agent of future destruction" (44). Her diplomacy and desire to stop the war are changed after her pleas to Talthybius not to kill her youngest daughter, Polyxena, go unanswered. Polyxena is carried away by the soldiers to be sacrificed in honor of Achilles' death, and Hecuba's grief turns to rage:

> Oh, my child, this goes past all endurance. Now I am no longer who I was. My husband dead, my children gone, now my dear, dear littlest daughter, what god in heaven what power below can help me now as I feel myself

> sinking into a rage I should have died long ago but I was kept alive as though by the gods saved to witness more and each time to witness worse. Until now I myself finally feel this rage of war deep deep within me. I would myself have vengeance. (www.charlesmee.com/plays/trojan.html)

Hecuba's change of heart follows the cause-and-effect rules of realist dramaturgy— her feelings and actions follow as clear results of her circumstances—and so using the conventional tools of character analysis work well in her case. But also she makes evident the limits of patience; the cruelty of circumstance and brutality of occupying forces brings about the apparent need to assert nationhood in self-defense and continue the spread of violence. When Hecuba calls Aeneas out of hiding to leave Troy, create a new, strong nation, and to return and seek vengeance against the Greeks, she is emblematic of the Stanislavskian and stereotypically masculine desire, agency and action. In the dialectic of Mee's play, both feminine and masculine, feminist theory and "bourgeois humanism" can be seen in one complex character; in addition, the first act is dominated by one worldview and the second by another, but each contains interactive traces of the other. So rather than a solid container for truth, Mee's play and characters are moving, changing, interactive organisms.

Embodied empathy and intertextuality

Inspired by the form of Mee's plays, in which "characters do not develop psychologically but are the 'variable sum of random moments,'" (Bryant-Bertail 41), this rehearsal process involves collecting texts related to the play and characters and putting

them together in solo performances devised by each actor. In order to allow the variety of people and cultural artifacts with which she is in an ongoing conversation to intersect and overlap, the actor might understand her way of working as deliberately intertextual. In Marvin Carlson's essay "Invisible Presences – Performance Intertextuality," he discusses the way in which "ghosts" of previous performances are imprinted on the consciousness of audience members and influence their reception of a play. He uses as an example Jean Stapleton:

> A recent article in New York *Newsday*, for example, began: "Three of the most–loved women in America will be on stage together tonight. There's actress Jean Stapleton. There's Julia Child, as played by Stapleton [stage figure and character]. And there's the invisible but inevitable presence of Edith Bunker, the loveable Queens housewife Stapleton created for *All in the Family*." Although Jean Stapleton is a stage actress of considerable experience and ability, any role she plays at this point in her career will for much of the audience be 'ghosted' by the 'invisible but inevitable' presence of Edith Bunker (113).

Jean Stapleton's identity as an actor, then, is clearly shaped by a number of overlapping and even conflicting discourses. While the woman onstage appears as a single identity, she represents a variety of voices and stories. Those ghosts are also present for Stapleton: she carries on her body the memory having thought about, interacted and empathized with other characters, and in some sense shapes those memories into a new and different character.

Carlson discusses intertextuality and ghosting mostly in regard to audience reception. He suggests that the elements of production – a known actor, costumes, scenic elements, etc. – carry with them the resonance of previous experiences, which then influence our impressions of a performance. In other words, we see (and are affected by) the "ghosts" of former roles in the actors who are onstage in front of us, or of plays we have seen before in the theatre we are attending. He also discusses the possibility that directors might capitalize on this effect on the production end, deliberately re-using motifs throughout a body of work in much the same way as Charles Mee does in his plays. In the process we undertook, the actors, in rehearsal and performance, were encouraged to deliberately conjure and engage the memories of people with whom they had previous conversations through the gestures and shapes their bodies made, the choices they made about characters' desires and actions, and the feelings they experienced about their characters' situations.

The solo performances were intended to increase the actors' awareness of various relationships and materials that shaped their performances of these roles (such as their own autobiographies, the work of other actors who have performed the role, etc.), texts that included conversations with friends, family or other members of their communities not directly involved with the production. I described the creation of these solo performances in terms of the "composition" exercises Tina Landau describes in her and Anne Bogart's work:

> Compositions are assignments we give to the company to have them create short, specific theatre pieces addressing a particular aspect of the

> work. Anne and I use Composition during the Source-work period of a rehearsal to engage the collaborators in the process of generating their own work around the source. The assignment will usually include an overall intention or structure as well as a substantial list of ingredients which must be included in the piece. … These ingredients are to a Composition what single words are to a paragraph or essay. The creator makes meaning by their arrangement. (28)

Included in these students' "lists of ingredients" were some of their characters' lines from the play, pieces of outside research regarding their characters (many of which were mythological and already carried with them certain stories), songs or other artworks they associated with their characters, all of the Viewpoints, and, most importantly, snippets of the interviews they had conducted on topics related to the play, performed as exactly as possible. The idea was that the actors would weave traces of these various conversations and interactions into solo "character study" performances, which would haunt them again in the context of the larger production of *The Trojan Women,* allowing their bodies in rehearsal and performance to be the site where the memory of all of these different texts intersected. So as opposed to understanding identity and desire through the lens of an "insider/outsider" perspective (a character's feelings and desires are discovered internally and revealed on the outside of the container/body, or an actor steps outside of the character and observes behavior while performing it), actors could imagine their embodied experiences of these performances as hands drawing thread through a number of different kinds of cloth to create a quilt.

Ideally, this process would have been undertaken in the context of a separate course aligned with the play, in order to give the actors time to work on all parts of the construction of their characters, but the department's curriculum had not been arranged to accommodate such an extensive project. Because they were not taking a course on building solo performance compositions or ethnographic interviewing, I had to find ways to introduce these ideas through other means. During the audition process, Rebecca Hewett—a PhD student and the production dramaturg with whom I was working—and I introduced some very basic Viewpoints vocabulary and then asked students to create short performance compositions in groups that were based on scenes from the play, so we incorporated composition work into the audition process to expose actors very early on to the idea of putting together their own performance pieces. To honor Mee's request regarding casting, in auditions we were not necessarily looking for people who appeared to be the "best" actors in the traditional sense, but for those who seemed to work well in groups, who seemed to be enthusiastic and creative, and who seemed open to new ways of working. Rebecca encouraged me to resist casting actors who might typically be considered appropriate for the roles in the play physically or in temperament, and made suggestions of actors who might even be considered opposite what people might expect to see, but who would bring complexity, depth, and thoughtfulness and dedication to their roles. We ended up with an ensemble cast of very bright, dedicated and energetic actors who committed their bodies and labor to the process even when we were working through rough patches.

At the first cast meeting, we watched and discussed videotapes of Anna Deavere Smith's performance work, and the actors practiced interviewing each other and embodying the responses they heard in those interviews. During the summer before the production was scheduled to begin rehearsal, I mailed packets to the actors that included material on in-depth interviewing techniques and a sort of "recipe" for composing a solo character piece. They were to find people in their communities (however they wished to define that) who were connected in some way with their characters, conduct interviews with those people, and compile those interviews with other texts of their choosing into performances to be shown at one of the first few rehearsals. While these performances were not technically ethnographic studies, they were intended to contain some of the elements of performance ethnography Joni Jones describes. Jones includes among the requirements for ethnographic performance the idea of "context:"

> The performance should center around an idea or question rather than provide a general 'you are there' atmosphere. The idea or question constitutes the context for the performance. … the referents not only include tangible artifacts and actual members of the culture being presented, but also video footage and audio tapes that give the audience the 'real' culture to contrast with the world created in the performance. (8)

In our production, the context each actor was trying to capture was a question or idea related to the concept of identity formation through his or her character's "given circumstances" in the play. While for the most part there were few artifacts from these students' actual fieldwork (although we did discuss how it would be interesting to piece together the characters' costumes from items borrowed from interviewees), thinking of learning about their characters' emotional experiences through the process of communicating with other people about similar issues allowed them to get away from only looking "into themselves" for inspiration; the formation of their characters' identities was a social and interactive process rather than an internally contained one.

The actors, all undergraduate theatre students, received no special academic credit for this production, and I was impressed with the rigor with which many of them approached work on these separate solo projects. There was certainly some confusion at the beginning of the process and reluctance on the part of some actors that didn't seem to be resistance to the ideas so much as a lack of understanding of the purpose of the assignment, or an understandable inability to devote extra time they did not have to what was already a long rehearsal schedule. The performances (which I describe in more detail below, in the context of reading the various production texts together) ran the gamut from compositions including multiple interviews with friends, family or other community members who had connections with their characters emotionally, culturally or otherwise through experience to character studies pieced together from songs, texts that were found in books, newspapers or magazines or originally written for these pieces, and bold physical interpretations. Essentially, the actors were taking on a kind of collective

production dramaturgy and performing their findings through their individual bodies. As they enacted this work individually for the group, they were providing the intellectual and physical foundation for the rest of our rehearsals. To clarify the process for the audience, we included the following note in the program: "In preparation for this production, the actors interviewed various people about topics related to the play and created performances based on those interviews. They have taken some of the physical responses of their interviewees and used them in developing characters, in order to also bring, as much as possible, their bodies and experiences onto the stage."

The Trojan Women: Experiential Reality

Mee has designated the first act of this play "The Prologue," and the second act "The Play," a contrast that seemed to support the choice to emphasize the tension between technology-based mediated images and physical bodies by making the first half a rehearsal for what was to come. The blurb describing the play clarifies somewhat Mee's reasons for making these designations: the destruction and violence of the first half is what makes possible, perhaps even necessary, the continuation of war and death: "The play by Euripides, set in the modern world, in which we see Troy in ruins, and a world reduced to such disarray and anguish that it will never recover again, but will, instead, spread death and disorder out into the world in all directions" (www.charlesmee.com/plays/trojan.html). With questions about the truth of bodies and the power of fictional images in mind, I was intrigued by the possibility of setting the first act of Mee's play—which examines the idea of "the real"— in the Payne Theatre populated by audiences and actors; that is, I wanted to set it in the current location and

time, but with a somewhat fictional framework. I introduced this idea by encouraging actors to think of themselves as being in this theatre during a time of war. Of course this was, in a sense, the truth. But I also asked them to imagine that the boundaries keeping the war in a distant location somewhere across the world had been erased, and their bodies were in the place being destroyed. In this scenario, the people on stage are "shell-shocked" actors and laborers in the theatre, alternately preparing for a play and trying to make sense of the violence that has shattered their world—they sometimes lapse into their characters' lines from Euripides' play and sometimes forget they are supposed to be rehearsing and simply talk about what has happened to them. This kind of fragmentation was impossible to sustain, as it wasn't clear to the actors how to get this situation across to the audience, but it was the framework that informed the design of the act. I was interested in emphasizing experience and memory at the beginning and making the second act about the possibility of redemption through love and imagination.

Mee describes the opening scene of the play as follows:

> Lights very slowly up on 100 dark-skinned "3rd world" women making computer components at little work tables.
>
> Early dawn.
>
> As the dawn light comes up very slowly, the Berlioz gradually fades.
>
> The women are in torn clothes; they are in shock; many have been raped.
>
> Their tables are set out on dirt.

> Behind them, the city is a smoking, still-burning ruin.
>
> Black ashes rain down continuously on the stage.
>
> (www.charlesmee.com/trojan.html)

Budget limitations prevented us from following these stage directions, and so we had to suggest the effects of warfare and colonization in a different way. Our first act had no set – the Payne stage was completely open, and all of the backstage area and stage machinery was visible. The first person who entered the space was the piano player, who we placed downstage left seated at an upright rehearsal piano. He began to play as the Trojan women entered from all possible doors and wings and sang a haunting arrangement of "All the Way." (Mee's script calls specifically for the Billie Holiday arrangement of this song, but because of our limited budget, Bradley Griffin, who generously agreed to direct music for the production, arranged the song himself. I selected the rest of the songs in our production from the public domain). We attempted to give the impression that the women were both there for a purpose and were seeking refuge from the "war" outside. The lighting designer, Jessica LaBaugh Rapier, described the initial light cue as follows:

> Audience comes into a smoky, dimly lit, chaotic space. There are patterns and shadows everywhere and some fixtures seem to be misplaced and misfocused, shining comfortably in the eyes of those entering the theater. There is a sickly, yellowish tinge to the light. The entire stage is visible. Light emanates from usually hidden spaces like the catwalks, the hallways, the partially uncovered pit. The overall feeling is one of unplanned, uncontrived chaos (1).

Some actors carried their own light sources, and there was a ghost light present on stage. The actors were dressed in contemporary street clothes—again Mee suggests particular designers for some characters (Yves Saint Laurent for Hecuba, for example) in order to clarify the class difference between royalty—Hecuba and those related to her— and the Trojan women who are from laboring classes, which becomes a conflict later in the play. Blair Hurry, our costume designer, simply dressed the "royals" in more elegant attire and the others in more casual clothing—we considered the possibility that Hecuba, Andromache and others might have been the "diva" actresses in this company, while the others were non-speaking actors or stagehands.

While Euripides' play begins with a conversation between the gods Poseidon and Athena regarding the fate of the Trojans and Greeks, the gods and fate in Mee's version are only occasionally invoked through ideas like numerology or Tarot cards—his adaptation is modern/postmodern in the sense of making the shift from a hierarchical arrangement with the heavens to a horizontal arrangement with people, the earth, nations,

and mystical concepts that are invoked by numbers or cards but suggest the idea of fate. He begins with human beings, and focuses on the ways human beings experience, make and remake their own worlds. *The Trojan Women* starts with women speaking monologues that describe the details of their experiences of war. He includes actual testimony by survivors of Hiroshima and of the Holocaust, and makes those the words of the Trojan women into whose world the audience enters at the beginning of the first act. The extremely explicit and brutal quotations Mee has chosen focus very closely on actual bodies and what they suffer in horrifying situations of war: even when reading the play online, the language he has chosen makes it impossible to ignore the specters of suffering bodies. After the chorus of women finish singing, Hecuba, who was the wife of Priam, the former King of Troy, rises from underneath a pile of rags and begins her lament.

> Last night: a child picked up
> out of its bed by its feet
> taken out to the courtyard
> swung round by a soldier in an arc
> its head smashed against a tree
> all this done while another soldier held back
> the child's mother
> all this done right before the mother's eyes.
> (www.charlesmee.com/plays/trojan.html)

The other women onstage follow, delivering a series of long disjointed speeches that frequently include equally grotesque and painful images. For example one, named Valerie, says,

> I was holding my son still, and I looked down at him. Fragments of glass had pierced his head. Blood was flowing from his head over his face. But he looked up at me and smiled. His smile has stayed glued in my memory. He didn't understand what had happened. And so he looked at me and smiled at my face which was all bloody. I had plenty of milk which he drank all throughout that day. I think my child sucked the poison right out of my body. And soon after that he died.
>
> (www.charlesmee.com/plays/trojan.html)

This passage is exemplary of the visceral and devastating language that constantly invokes the tortured bodies of women that Mee includes in this act of the play. The fact that much of the language comes from the actual embodied experiences of people to whom we had no access gave the words that much more weight, and gave the sense that the intense suffering they represented should be treated with intense respect.

How could we achieve this kind of reverence? Our own experiences of war in general and, in particular, the current war in Iraq, were limited to mediated images that seemed distant and sometimes unreal. While we were aware of what was being done in the name of the country of which most of us were citizens, we had no way of physically empathizing with the actual human beings whose homeland was being invaded, nor had any of us seen first hand the kind of destruction and pain described by Holocaust and

atomic bomb survivors. Conducting interviews with people whose bodies suffered certain kinds of traumas was a way of imagining these characters using the concepts of bodily understanding and context about which Joni Jones writes; thinking of Mee's characters as different "contexts" rather than as a rigid set of traits that were predetermined by a playwright allowed them to make connections that connected the "internal" world of the play with the "outside" world in which it would be performed. The solo performances provided some actors with a means through which to identify with the characters whose traumatic experiences they were to represent, and many of the actors' interviews overlapped with their characters' lives through a physical connection. Within any kind of representation, the use of this technique might be ethically questionable: having interviewed "real" people, regardless of who they were or what they had experienced, might be used as a mark of authenticity to bolster claims to truth; but in the realm of this production, the *experience* of the process was for the sake of actors participating in interactive communication rather than for proving a correct interpretation of character.

In Mee's play Andromache (whose husband Hector, the eldest son of Hecuba and Priam, was killed by Achilles in the war) attempts to speak several times in the beginning of the first act, but finds that she cannot. When she hears that she will be taken to Greece by Neoptolemus, the son of the man who killed her husband, she finally launches into a monologue that lasts for three pages of text. She begins by describing a pleasant memory of her privileged life, but immediately veers off into a traumatic memory of a bomb being dropped during the war. Hecuba pleads with Andromache to "remember her station," intending to keep her from agitating the Greek soldiers, and the young woman does just

that. She remembers all of the rules her class and position required her to follow: diets and sexual mores and etiquette, and then says that if she had known things would end this way she would have lived very differently. Her secret desires bring to mind Foucault's idea of biopower, specifically through the realm of sexuality. The power and privilege of the group to which she belonged (power that is derided shortly after her monologue ends by the Trojan women who come from less privileged classes) relied on the regulation of her body's true wants—she describes diets she has been on as being at war with her own body, for example. Her revelation of her secret desires is liberating, in a sense, as she is attempting to use her voice as a last grasp at gaining power over her own body, and the language she speaks after such a long repression is among the most startling in the play:

> And I can't help myself from thinking, too, if I'd known there were other things I meant to get things I would have liked if I'd known it was going to end so soon. When I was a girl I had a horse I loved so much I wanted to take him right inside me or suck his cock. And I would have done it, too, if I hadn't been so timid. Or I'd have hung myself in the bathroom things I didn't do because I was afraid, put a rope around your neck to get a more intense feeling you know cross dress wear pants and a necktie stand on a chair and hang from something while you use some cream and a vibrator I was always afraid I'd slip and fall but when you think about it now I might as well have run the risk.
>
> (www.charlesmee.com/plays/trojan.html)

Andromache's floundering grasp for power ultimately backfires: not only will she be taken to Greece by Neoptolemus, but Talthybius notices that her infant son, Astyanax, is still alive and orders that he be taken away and killed like all other Trojan men have been.

The actor who played Andromache, in her solo performance, chose to focus on the experience of being physically limited by the expectations of class and beauty. She interviewed a young woman who had won a beauty pageant, and who discussed the expectations placed upon her as the winner. In the performance, the actor sat on the floor looking in a small, hand-held mirror and carefully applied makeup as she, in the role of the woman she interviewed, described the experience of trying to maintain a very low weight without letting people know she was doing so: experimenting with diet pills, laxatives, etc. The actor then had the experience of speaking as a young woman who had struggled through ongoing attempts to control her own body, and at the same time of publicly revealing a dark secret that underlay her polished veneer. The context of the character of Andromache was a *question* about who writes the script for women in the middle or upper classes and who chooses whether or not one performs that script properly. The actor's preparation for the character was to engage with that intellectual question through having an embodied experience of the feelings involved in a struggle shared by her character and the subject of her interview. On stage, in Mee's play, her body stood in for multiple people at once—the mythological character of Andromache, Mee's characterization of Andromache, the woman from whom Mee borrowed the text for her lines, the actor's friend who had won a beauty pageant, and perhaps other audience members who had been through similar attempts to control the size and shape of

their bodies. It also brought the concept of imperialism to a personal and local level as well as a global one: nations who occupy other countries are attempting to own other people's bodies and coerce their participation in a set of rules they may not have chosen.

Performing the character of Cassandra, one of Hecuba's daughters, raises similar questions about power and the body, but this performer must also manage a context that includes her mythological possession of an exceptional power of perception that other people believe is mental illness. Cassandra enters shortly after Andromache's monologue, making a similar attempt to seize power from the men who will force her to be taken by King Agamemnon. In mythology, Apollo gave Cassandra the ability to see the future, but when he found out that she did not love him in return, he placed a curse upon her so that no one would believe her predictions. She is, in some ways, emblematic of the action of power on the body, as she was punished for not capitulating to Apollo's desires. She is often represented as being completely mad by the end of the Trojan War, and in Mee's play she enters in a rage. While she may be forced to follow the wishes of the invaders, she does not do so willingly: "Not for me the life of mourning the tears the nursing of my sorrow." She invokes sadomasochistic imagery in her predictions of how she will enact her dominance over her future husband:

> Let's have him, then, bring me into his home. Let me lie down with him stretch him out on a board put weights on his chest. Is this a man who likes to be bitten all over his body on his neck and chest? Does he like to

> be laced with needle and thread like a spider's web sewn down to his bed immobilized? Then he's chosen well which woman here to take back home with him. (www.charlesmee.com/plays/trojan.html)

The actor who played Cassandra divided her solo performance into three parts. The first interview she performed was with a friend who spoke frankly, on condition of anonymity, about her experience of having been sexually abused. The second was with another friend who claimed to be an empath and whose family was full of women who had dreams that predicted the future; this friend said that despite the fact that she was certain she had this power, she never told anyone about it for fear people would think she was crazy. In the final part of her performance, the actor chose a quotation from a schizophrenic and had each of us in the room read a line from the quotation in order to emphasize the fragmentation of that person's thinking. The actor gained a new empathy for the loss of power experienced by her friend who had been abused, and a clearer understanding of the discovery of a power that may seem threatening and must be controlled or kept a secret. At the same time, she had us as audience members speak as a schizophrenic, and experience as a group the attempt to make sense of our own fragmented thinking. Among the intertexts with which this actor was working were experiences of the ultimate loss of sexual power, the discovery of a power that had to remain a secret, and the psychological struggle resulting from the body's memory of those experiences. The dominatrix fantasies that form Mee's Cassandra's "madness" become a reaction to the impossibility of the situation in which her body was placed; her

rage becomes understandable, and her strong will in the face of her circumstances became all the more admirable.

Masculinity, Action and Colonization

The problem of imperialist politics and colonization is the reason for the first act's emphasis on the continued violence done to citizens of occupied territories even after the terror of warfare has supposedly ended (on Mee's website, the play is part of a tetralogy entitled "Imperial Dreams"). Interestingly, the men in the first act frequently lay claim to the language of *action*, and naturalize their behavior through allying that language with gender identity: acting is doing something, and doing something is being a man. They enter shortly after the chorus of women finish discussing whether or not Aeneas should be sent to avenge the wrongs done to Troy. Talthybius, a Greek messenger, comes to tell Hecuba that she and the other women of the island (including Hecuba's daughters) are to be taken as wives and slaves by the Greek invaders. He presents himself as a diplomat, and claims that the news he brings is not only beyond his control, it is "not to his taste." He goes to great lengths to explain that he is a cultured man capable of great sensitivity, delivering a litany of his refined tastes, and attempts to rationalize his horrible news. His supposedly diplomatic speech without a doubt echoes the self-righteous reasoning President Bush gave for the war in Iraq, with his claim that, "The United States and other nations did nothing to deserve or invite this threat. But we will do everything to defeat it."

Talthybius makes the enslavement of the Trojan women sound inevitable, a result of the unreflective action required by the pace of the contemporary world: "These days

war is so unsparing. Once upon a time men fought by day and grieved at night; they had the opportunity to consider the world that they were making; but now they fight both day and night, It leaves no time for grief and so men have come to adopt a certain hardness that never leaves them even when the shooting stops" (www.charlesmee.com/plays/trojan.html). Bryant-Bertail states that in Tina Landau's 1996 production of Mee's play at the University of Washington, Seattle, the men arrived and left "in a cloud of manly operatic glory" (44). As a visual metaphor for Talthybius' placement of himself above the fray and his unwillingness to allow his body to interact closely with the victims of war (or its perpetrators, the soldiers who accompany him when he enters), the lighting designer pointed out that we might actually make use of the hydraulic Genie lift normally used for lights and set construction. We had the actor playing Talthybius remain on the lift at its highest setting for the entire act, except when he lowers himself to engage in conversation with Polyxena.

For most of the act, the soldiers, named Bill and Ray-Bob, remained on either side of the lift at the bottom. Talthybius was to represent the people in power who had the luxury of removing themselves from the physical realities of the situation, and could believe the illusion that the war was actually ended. The soldiers, on the other hand, express the idea of power exercised through the body:

> BILL: The war ended? You say this to the men: the war is not ended, they say, we are the war, We ourselves are the war.
>
> RAY BOB: Men act. We know this. Attach no value to it, particularly. To act is to be. No more, no less. (www.charlesmee.com/plays/trojan.html)

Significantly, Talthybius' and Bill and Ray Bob's words show how dangerous the language and politics of action without thought can be in the context of colonization and control of other people's bodies to support the lifestyle of an elite and untouchable few.

The male characters in the first act of the play (with the exception of Aeneas) carry with them the challenge of representing the colonizers and perpetrators of war. Menelaus, who started the Trojan War to get back his wife back from Paris, arrives late in the act seeking Helen so that he may take her away from Troy. Mee's Menelaus is clearly affected by the war in which he has just been fighting, and his long speeches, once again, seem to focus on his own body and his control over it, his physical ability to dominate the women to whom he speaks, and his right to have power over Helen's body through the institution of marriage:

> I said she is my wife. I said: I'll have her back. The truth is I can sleep in a bed of ice if I choose I can detach my head and let it trundle off somewhere on its own. At times I feel myself going down a steep and winding staircase to a bottomless depth but I look with wonder at my hands from time to time when they've gone numb. They'll do anything I like. Take my cock in one hand and rub it on your bellies and hang you on a peg to cut you open do you think if I cut the artery in your neck you'd

> spurt blood? I'll have her back or kill you one by one until I've cleared by path to her. (www.charlesmee.com/plays/trojan.html)

Menelaus's violently sexual speech, following shortly after Cassandra's, takes on an entirely different meaning; his is the destructive speech of an aggressor driven by the laws of masculinity and property, rather than someone trying to take back his *own* body from someone who had stolen it.

The actor who played Menelaus chose to interview someone whose story was probably the most closely connected to the actual experience of war and violence: his entire performance was based on one interview with a man who had been a mercenary in Peru. The performance involved the actor sitting at a table with a single harsh light focused on his face. When the light went out, he would ask a question as himself, the interviewer. When it came back on, he performed the former mercenary's responses. The mercenary spoke of spending a great deal of time getting special training to be in the military, and how it then became very tempting years later, when someone offered a great deal of money to do the same thing he had been doing for free. He pointed out that getting paid to fight in a war was especially appealing after he had been forced into tedious employment otherwise, and spoke of the pleasure and thrill he found in the experience of being in a war situation.

The words "this is how men are" are continually spoken throughout the play, and often refer to the experience of warfare and its influence on concepts of masculinity. It was compelling that the instigator of the Trojan War was constructed only through one

interview: there weren't as many voices in his performance, but the use of one voice for an aggressive force representative of war and colonization seemed appropriate. At the same time, his need to assert his identity and control don't escape outside forces. Mee's Menelaus is driven by competition for his wife, and the mercenary's identity was shaped by material needs and his training as a soldier. In general, all of the texts with which actors were working in the first act raised issues of the "real" effects of suffering and of repressive material situations on the bodies and identities of people, and at the same time the development of a strong desire for action and agency to escape those situations or change them.

A Love Story: Imagination and Possibility

While the first act of our production was intended to invoke ideas of the "real" and realism, the second act was intended to be about performance; or, more specifically, if the first act was about representation, the second act was about possibility and imagination. Yes Mee calls the second act "The Play," and the environment is intended to be a very different one from the previous setting: "The dramaturgical rules have shifted here: this is dreamland, a world of drift, heaven" (www.charlesmee.com/plays/trojan.html). The dream-like setting for this act also emphasizes the body, but this time it is about healing and pleasure: it is intended to be set in "A spa. Exercise machines of all sorts. Bowls of fruit. Bottles of Evian water. Fresh flowers. Piles of towels. A hot tub. Women are working out on these machines. This is the chorus: they are, variously, patrons and instructors at the spa" (www.charlesmee.com/plays/trojan.html). In our production, the story of Dido and

Aeneas took place in a world of image and artifice that existed in conversation with the "reality" of the first act.

Again, the lack of budget for set design prevented us from creating the spa world Mee calls for. But I thought it would be compelling to have the act reflect the idea of a "post-war" world as much as possible, and so we decided to set Carthage on a suburban lawn that suggested the suburban expansion of the 1950s U.S. At one point in the act, Dido says to Aeneas,

> I was thinking we were traveling by camel in the desert, and we decided to stop and rest on a lawn in the suburbs. My blouse was off. And there were all these people playing croquet around us. … It was a wonderful community in this village and we were having a feast at a long table outdoors and someone gave me a baby and it was you. (www.charlesmee.com/plays/trojan.html)

Hence, Dido's "dreamworld," a world of image, artifice, possibility and pleasure was the inspiration for this act. We covered the stage in astro-turf, projected a Technicolor-blue sky on a scrim at the back of the stage, and I bought garlands of artificial red roses with which to drape various items. There is supposed to be a hot tub in Mee's spa, but we chose a plastic inflatable wading pool of the kind one sees on suburban lawns, and to make water I bought blue and silver Christmas tinsel. There were certain references that we hoped to make, but which proved to be impossible because of budget constraints. For example, I had hoped to open the act with the theme song for Douglas Sirk's film *Imitation of Life*, and to have the costumes for Dido evoke Lana Turner's character in that

film. Some of the choices—the saturated color and artificial flowers, for example—were inspired by Sirk and the comment his film made about the concept of identity as an elaborate performance.

The lighting designer describes the initial image of the second act in the following way: "Blue blue afternoon sky, warm sun streaming in from the west, bright green lawn. This is a world cut from a magazine, almost cartoon-like in its color and precise definition of shape" (Cue Sheet 4). We decided to use the main curtain between acts, so that when it rose to reveal the second act setting, it would be clear that this was a proscenium stage. Aeneas and the soldiers from the first act, tattered and weary from their long journey, entered from stage right just below the proscenium to give the idea that they were entering a picture from outside the frame. In addition, Rebecca Hewett had the idea to costume the women as different laborers in this suburban neighborhood— a mailwoman, a milkwoman, a grocer, a maid, etc. – that one might expect to see in a Norman Rockwell painting or other of that sort of Americana from the post-war U.S. Having these people speak the sexually explicit language of the chorus in this act would have served multiple purposes: pointing out the labor of the upkeep of such a neatly trimmed, well-scrubbed idea of family life, and belying the wholesome, repressed veneer of the fifties through having these women talking about the pleasures of the body. The ideas for costuming had to be abandoned, but again, they were among our first impulses when imagining the design of the act.

Our solution was to combine the idea of suburban America and a spa, and to turn this into a sort of suburban country club at which the chorus members were dressed in

white tennis outfits—in this way we were able to refer to the idea of healing and the body through making reference to recreation and pleasure. As the curtain rose, the piano player (now seated upstage right at a grand piano) accompanied the chorus as they sang "I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate" and performed a dance number (choreographed by Dustin Wills, who played Aeneas) reminiscent of production numbers from screen musicals like *Singin' in the Rain*. When the soldiers appeared downstage right, the women welcomed them into the dream world and tried to comfort them, as the men sang the praises of the physical joy they find in contact with women: "I like to put my head on a woman's breast, have her arms around me so that I can't escape, and fall asleep." Dido's entrance, after which she gazes at Aeneas and falls immediately in love, was accompanied by the song "Every Little Movement (Has a Meaning All its Own)." While we weren't able to use the *Imitation of Life* theme song, this was the lyrical equivalent in the public domain, and was even more appropriate for the theme of the act: "Every little movement has a meaning of its own/Every thought and feeling by some posture can be shown/And every love thought that comes a stealing/o'er your being must be revealing/all its sweetness in some appealing little gesture/all its own"—the song is all about acting and love (or affect in general, really) as performance.

Despite the fact that we wished to highlight theatrical images and artifice in this act, the focus is still on the body. This act poses the question of whether or not the pleasures of a body in love can redeem past harms and restore hope; whether through the deliberate performance and production of love one can transform the world. The texts

Mee chose to set the tone for this act came from the Kama Sutra. Here, the chorus describes to soldiers who have entered their world a variety of sexual positions:

> CAROL: You know if you grasp your penis and move it in circles inside her we call this Churning the Curds.
>
> JIM: Unh-hunh.
>
> ANDREA: Or, drawing up her feet, she might revolve her hips so that your penis circles deep inside her, we call that the Honey Bee. Or if she sits astride you, facing your feet, brings both her feet up to your thighs, and works her hips frantically, this is known as the Swan Sport.
>
> ALICE: Or, catching your penis, she guides it into her quim clings to you and shakes her buttocks; this is called the Lovely Lady in Control. … (www.charlesmee.com/plays/trojan.html)

While "The Prologue"—which I read as representing historical memory and how it imprints itself on bodies—emphasized the trauma inflicted on people during wartime through the use of the actual words of victims describing what had been done to them, this segment is about the pleasure of sexual bodies, and how one can choose to enact that pleasure in different ways. This act is about the possibility and hope that can heal the body through love and sexuality. The trauma of the previous act is still alive in the soldiers: there is a section in the middle in which one soldier mentions that "Sometimes I dream the world is ending everything is burning and there is nowhere to run," which sets off memories of the war in Aeneas and the others, but their anguish diminishes when the language returns to pleasure.

Dido is queen of the hyper-sexual women who live in this world, and the "dream-land" over which she rules might be seen as the "feminist utopia" described by one of the chorus of women in the first act: 'In a very real sense, feminist utopias celebrate what we usually think of as traditionally female tasks and traits: nurturance, expressiveness, support or personal growth and development, a link with the land or earth" (www.charlesmee.com/plays/trojan.html).

Mostly, Dido speaks in poetic and sensual language. As she begins to remove Aeneas's clothes before she bathes him in the pool, she says: "In spring, I think the dawn is most beautiful. In summer, the nights. In autumn, the evenings" (www.charlesmee.com/plays/trojan.html). She also reads Tarot cards. Mee describes Dido as "a black woman in her thirties," but the woman we cast was an Asian woman, and in a quarrel with Aeneas near the end of the act, she points out her "otherness." She asks if he feels he must leave her because he is afraid of her difference: "Because I'm Asian? … Because I'm foreign to you? … Because I'm a woman?" (www.charlesmee.com/plays/trojan.html). Again, the contrast between the colonization and control of the first act and the exoticism of the second act somewhat reflective of the argument between Stanislavsky-based actor training and more experimental methods, or the rift between theatre and performance studies. Dido and her world (the second act) are exotic and Other, but also represent a world that frames the body as a center of pleasure and comfort and love, welcoming, warm and inclusive. The world from which Aeneas comes is the one that has been destroyed by conflict, and seeks deliberate action, strong identity and strict rules.

The actor who played Dido also played one of the chorus of women in the first act, and constructed her solo performance in three parts. In her first interview, she spoke with a woman who claimed to have been under the power of a "love spell" at one point in her life, evoking the exotic and potentially superstitious side of Dido, but also the concept of love at first sight. The second interview was addressed to her character in the first act, and was with a woman who had been sexually assaulted, who revealed the ongoing scars the memory of that experience had left on her psyche. The last interview was with an exotic dancer, who described what she has learned about men from her work. She ends this interview with the dancer expressing the desire to do the work she does to gain sexual agency: "I'm doing this for me." Throughout the performance, in between sections, she used three Madonna songs, which were both a reference to her own subjectivity and identity (she is an avid and vocal Madonna fan), and a reference to her final interview: the dancer reveals that she used these three songs the first time she performed in a strip club. Her performance highlighted the compelling questions about sexuality and power that the play raises, as she took on her own body the identities of women who had experienced power through the public enactment of sexuality and also who had been victims of attempted disempowerment and lack of control over their own bodies and emotions. Invoking Madonna as one of the intertexts also brought up the idea of deliberately manipulating signs of identity to achieve agency through sexuality (in contrast with the cause-and-effect structure of the first act in which identity and agency are often coerced by outside circumstances).

The character Aeneas serves as a bridge between the play's first act and the second, and so in our production the actor's performance involved carrying the realism of Act One into the second act's theatrical world. When he appears at the end of Mee's first act, Hecuba tells Aeneas to "Give up hope. Your time has come to find all those who have survived, take them to a new country and build a home. Make it strong. Put your trust in power alone. Make a nation that can endure." He launches into a monologue detailing the gruesome results of war he has seen and their effects on his psyche: "I'm not a child. After the things I've lived to see." In the original story (not a part of Euripedes' play, but of Virgil's *Aenead*), Aeneas leaves Troy and goes to Carthage, where he falls in love with Queen Dido. Here, the story is the same… on his way to found Rome, he gets sidetracked when he finds a beautiful woman in an exotic world and falls in love.

The traditional story of Dido and Aeneas ends with Mercury being sent to order Aeneas to leave Carthage and fulfill his destiny. He departs sorrowfully, but must uphold his duty and his promise to Queen Hecuba. Again, in Mee's play, there are no gods forcing Aeneas to do his duty. What reminds Aeneas he must move on are the ghosts of history from the first act: laws of masculinity that his body has taken on and his responsibility to his country. He must leave, he says, because "This is a woman's world … not a world I've made. The world I promised I would make. … A world without false hope. A world not built on sentiment. Ideas we used to have of how things could be before we learned in our time who we really are. A world that can endure" (www.charlesmee.com/plays/trojan.html). When Dido points out that this could be his home, that he could change his path and devote his life to love, Aeneas is joined by the

other men in reciting a litany of the laws of masculinity. We had divided the text of this speech up among the men, because they are intended to overlap with Aeneas "in frantic explanation." By happy accident, all of the men were having trouble learning the lines of this speech, and so we ended up having them line up together (Mee's stage directions call for the men to be lined up against the back wall), and pull folded up scripts very deliberately out of their pockets and read from the sheets of paper. In this case, Aeneas's choice to leave was his own: he decided to be a man of action; but it was a choice shaped by the script of who he, as a man, is supposed to be: "men are meant to DO something or else they've just never existed" (www.charlesmee.com/plays/trojan.html).

The question that drives the argument between Dido and Aeneas is one of identity and agency: who makes choices to stay or go, and what drives those decisions? While she is poetic and exoticized and representative of the "Other" in this act, at one point Dido also expresses a stereotypically feminine view of love, one garnered from mythology and Hollywood movies alike:

> You know: All great love stories end in death because the truth of life is that all of any of us ever have is one great love in life, not two or three or a hundred. Just one. And when we die—whether sooner or later it doesn't matter, because that's all we are given in life, only one chance at real love, and all the rest is just what comes before and after—and if a love story ended differently it would be untrue.
>
> (www.charlesmee.com/plays/trojan.html)

Aeneas argues: “No. We make our own choices.” This comes at the end of the Tarot reading, about which the two disagree: are the cards predictors of fate, or are they open to interpretation depending upon one’s perception? Does will make a difference? Or is destiny set in place?

Unlike in the mythological story, Dido does not commit suicide at the end of Mee’s play. She tells Aeneas to go, and then, in a moment in which the war of the first act enters into the love of the second, all of the couples on stage fight violently. Dido fights with Aeneas in the pool and tries to drown him, and Mee leaves it up in the air whether or not he dies. We chose to leave the question of will and determination, of the “truth” of this story, up in the air, and ended the play with the two locked in an exhausted embrace on the ground center stage. We wanted to end with the idea that while people’s bodies are shaped in many ways by outside forces, there is still the possibility that love, pleasure and hope and a combination of imagination and action can bring about change. Aeneas, as the bridge between the first and second acts, contains elements of both worlds. While he is able to converse in Dido’s language of love and eroticism—“I love your hair, I love to brush it and wind it around my fingers. I love your ear”—he also feels beholden to his promise and feels that he must move forward and accomplish something.

The actor who played Aeneas put together a compelling performance from his experiences traveling in Europe over the summer. He set up chairs to appear to be the seats on an airplane and projected slides from his own travels on a screen in the background. He designated shifts in character by moving seats in the airplane for each of three interviews about leaving loved ones behind. The first was a straight man who talks

about his lack of interest in commitment and his tendency to end relationships by just leaving women he has taken up with. The other was a woman discussing her experience of falling in love with someone and having to leave him, and the third was someone discussing the death of a loved one. Interestingly, the actor chose to focus on the experience of love rather than that of war and action. But because his character was woven together from people with opposite points of view—the stereotypical masculine fear of commitment and the woman whose has a strong desire to stay with the one she loves despite her need to leave and pursue a career, for example—his performance carried traces of a number of perspectives on Aeneas's dilemma. And to a certain degree, his dual purpose in the play— building a strong nation and acting within the expected boundaries of a stereotypically masculine identity or relishing the pleasure of love, sexuality and community and building a world based on goals other than conflict or vengeance—is another element reflective of the rift between identity-and-action-based actor training and ensemble-driven work built from a community this process attempted to reconcile.

The Viewpoints, Ideology and Identity Formation

As another step toward that reconciliation between the idea of theatricality and that of real experience, I imagined the solo performances not only being used by the actors a "way in" to empathizing with their characters, but also to use some of the external physical mannerisms of the people they interviewed to create movement and vocal patterns for their characters. The actors were working with "external" sources as patterns for their characters, but those sources included actual people and not just stereotyped

images. As a way of incorporating the bodies and voices of the interviewees into the production, when rehearsals began at the end of August, we used the solo performances in conjunction with both the standard Stanislavski-based techniques of script analysis and The Viewpoints. Here again, I was experimenting with the idea of showing interconnecting and moving boundaries between these theories rather than the rigid and exclusive ones usually assigned to methodologies for working on plays.

The Viewpoints are

> a philosophy of movement translated into a technique for 1) training performers and 2) creating movement on stage…. [they] are the set of names given to certain basic principles of movement; these names constitute a language for talking about what happens or works on stage…. [they] are points of awareness that a performer or creator has while working. (Landau 21)

I was first exposed to this training and rehearsal technique through the work of the SITI Company, of which Charles Mee is a member, and who popularized it to the degree that Viewpointing is now taught and used widely across the United States and the world. Mary Overlie, who originated this work and currently teaches in NYU's Experimental Theatre wing, stresses that these spatio-temporal relationships are occurring in the world all the time; for her, these "points of awareness" are a physical means of research, and using them is a matter of simply noticing one's body and how it relates to space and time.

The Viewpoints operate in an improvisational structure. Actors begin moving around the stage or rehearsal room, gradually increasing their consciousness of a number

of elements of time and space, including (for the SITI Company) tempo, kinesthetic response, repetition (within and outside of the body), shape (again, internal and external), gesture, architecture, spatial relationship and topography. This vocabulary can also be invoked in rehearsal, and gives actors more agency in creating stage pictures: for example, rather than saying "move downstage right before this line," a director might say, "I'm not getting a sense of the power dynamic between the two of you. Change your spatial relationship a few times and we can see which way clarifies that." The use of Overlie's research begins to transform the relationship between actors and director from a vertical/hierarchical one to a more horizontal and democratic arrangement.

Many people who use The Viewpoints see it as an alternative to Stanislavski-based psychological character analysis and use it as a statement of opposition to realism, but in fact it works quite well together with the concepts of need or desire, obstacle and action within an ensemble of actors. The Viewpoints encourage actors to negotiate being both individuals with desires and goals, and being part of a group whose energy influence how they choose their actions. In a recent workshop I attended here in Austin, the instructor (a member of the SITI Company who has also worked with Mary Overlie) stressed that improvising in this way is about making physical choices, acting on those choices, and noticing the consequences of one's actions. The consequences then lead the actor to the next course of action. Some method based techniques (Meisner's approach in particular) are also about making choices and noticing the effect of those choices on one's partner, then allowing the reverberations from one's actions to stimulate the next action.

The difference, perhaps, is that Viewpoints begins with the body: the actor's attention is on the physical and public aspects of identity and action, but it does not preclude the actor having internal psychological responses or desires. Emphasizing immediate bodily reactions (kinesthetic response) and repetition, for example, gives actors the opportunity to see how their emotional responses and habits are being formed in a social setting—they see how their bodies take on patterns established by the group, and alternately how their actions can change those patterns. Stanislavski-based work has a similar result, but *begins* with words and psychology: the actor's attention is on developing his character as an individual, although the external stimuli (the playwright's words, the director's directions, the other actors' actions) and physical manifestations of that work are essential to the development of the character in later stages. The "internal vs. external" containment framework makes it difficult for actors trained in Stanislavski-based techniques to recognize the interactive parts of analysis and training, while using the The Viewpoints as an intertext helps reveal how individual desire and action change according to the movement of a group.

The first few rehearsals involved intensive Viewpoints workshops with PhD student Jaclyn Pryor, during which the actors learned the theory and practice of that technique in more detail. As luck would have it, the Payne Theatre was not in use during the weeks that led up to the production, and we were able to use the theatre where the play was to be performed for the remainder of our rehearsals, so that the architecture of the space itself became another intertext in our exploration of this play. During the first few rehearsals in that room, I asked the students to choose one or two of their characters'

lines from the play and one or two physical gestures from their character study performances. While a group usually has to be careful not to let the elements of repetition and kinesthetic response overwhelm Viewpoints improvisations, I was interested in seeing if deliberately using physical gestures from interviewees as the physical idioms that are repeated throughout an improvisation might make clear the process through which physical behavior gets learned, repeated and passed on, sometimes almost unconsciously.

We did not have time in this rehearsal process to work specifically on deliberately stitching together characters from the physical mannerisms of various people. But I hoped that through having performed the exact words and gestures of other people talking about what had happened to them, and then having some of that material performed again by the group as a whole, the students' solo performances would, through the process of ghosting as described above by Marvin Carlson, infuse the performance itself with the spirit of many people's experiences. Beginning the process by focusing the actors' attention on, first, having conversations with people around them about topics related to the play and, second, on the *physical* experience of their live bodies as an interactive part of a group, I hoped to encourage them to consider their process of creating character as being socially formed through a variety of texts; rather than being exclusively internally and psychologically produced, the order of the rehearsal process was intended to make actors aware of the importance of their bodies' situations in historical contexts in the formation of identity.

Acting and Performance Studies: A Love Story

After our solo performances and Viewpoints workshops, we used a variety of approaches in rehearsal to stage the play in the few short weeks that remained, and the shift in dramaturgical rules Mee describes between the first and second acts did not really become clear to us until we began to try to embody the words of the different acts. The first act lent itself particularly well to an exercise to which I was first introduced while studying at three-week intensive training workshop with the SITI Company several years ago and that Bogart and Landau refer to as montage or storyboarding. Similar to Boal's Image Theatre exercise, in this technique actors create "snapshots" or storyboards for the scene on which they are working: "Five shots or takes, each one a maximum of fifteen seconds long, separated by *blackouts*, during which those in the audience close their eyes" (*Viewpoints Book* 143), keeping the Viewpoints of space always in mind. This process lends actors a great deal of agency and creativity, as they are encouraged to think like painters, sculptors, filmmakers or photographers. They then add movement to get from one still image to the next. In order to arrive at what these still images might be, however, we began each rehearsal with a discussion that used fairly typical language of play analysis: why might this scene be in the play? What role does it play in the act as a whole? What is your character's relationship to the others? Does she have a goal or desire in the scene? What does he want from the other characters? What are some options for possible actions he or she might perform to achieve that goal?

In the second act, the collage of events and images did not lend itself as well to either the language of Stanislavski or the technique of storyboarding the scenes with still

images. The dreamlike quality of this act was more like a piece of music or a dance performance, in that it worked best when the actors *moved* while attempting to determine how best to determine what purpose each section of the act served. There is the litany of sexual positions, there are many songs, there is a segment in which everyone couples off and begins dancing, terms of endearment are exchanged and lovers quarrels ensue and a Dido gives Aeneas a Tarot reading, but all of these fragments are not tied together by a through line of progress, necessarily. The connections are free-associative and time seems condensed—what happens in Dido and Aeneas's relationship over the course of this act might take years in real time. The dramaturgy in this act is driven by desire, but it is mostly erotic and emotional rather than being about conquest and control. The structure of the first act is, for the most part, conflict driven and cause-and-effect related—it might be understood to be the "Stanislavski-based" act; the second is something "Other," the feminist and poststructuralist "performance studies" act that is less logical or rational.

However, this play's title encapsulates Mee's dialectical and interactive writing style—neither side is a container that exists on its own separately from the other. Bryant-Bertail writes that in Landau's production,

> In post-performance discussions and interviews, many spectators, as well as the actors themselves, seemed to search for continuity between the two acts with their starkly contrasting sites and atmospheres. Even though there was no more Hecuba, Andromache, Menelaus, Talthibius, Polyxena or Cassandra, the audience recognized them in the actors and searched for

> signs that the actors or characters remembered what had taken place in the horror of Troy. (46)

One might read *The Trojan Women: A Love Story* as two different faces of one play—the first face is devastation and war, the second is love and pleasure; the first is the "real" representation of women, the second is a fictional romance; the first is based in historical fact, the second in fantasy; the first act, while it is the women's story, is masculine in spirit, and the second is feminine. But the title might also be read as two separate clauses, one describing each other—there are clearly elements of each act in the other. The change in Hecuba is actually motivated by her love and devotion to her daughter, and the war itself was a result of the romance between Menelaus and Helen. At the end of the second act, Dido "grabs Aeneas by the hair and pushes him under the water," attacking him violently: she ravages his body in order to get him to devote his life to loving her. There is a sense that one side cannot exist without the other.

In a sense, the process on which we were just beginning to work was reaching towards what this play achieves (that is, difference, movement and interaction within the totality of a play), but through the actor's body on the level of building an identity. Performing multiple voices in their construction of one character was intended to suggest the idea that identification supports the complexity and collectivity of individual people rather than annihilating difference. In short, we were reaching toward what George Lakoff and Mark Johnson might call an "experientialist" view of acting, a performance that,

> depends on understanding, which emerges from functioning in the world. It is through such understanding that the experientialist alternative meets the objectivist's need for an account of truth. It is through the coherent structuring of experience that the experientialist alternative satisfies the subjectivist's need for personal meaning and significance. … What [subjectivism and objectivism] both miss … is an interactionally based and creative understanding. … From the experientialist perspective, metaphor is a matter of *imaginative rationality*. … New metaphors are capable of creating new understandings and, therefore, new realities. (235)

There is undoubtedly a great deal of work still to be done in investigating the kind of process I suggest here, particularly with regard to accountability and participation, that would turn this process into a true conversation between community members. But I began by examining ways to work with the concepts of context, subjectivity and multivocality: how is a strong individual subject shaped by historical context, and how are other people a significant part of that context? And how can democratizing a person's/character's subjectivity become the grounds for future action? With the preliminary work we had done in the early rehearsals under our belts, the questions of individual desire involved in Stanislavski-based analysis—what do I want, what am I doing to get what I want, etc.—became less about simply determining the playwright's intentions or the "appropriate" course of action a character should take, because the answers were based on a pool of knowledge that came from multiple sources; the movement of the characters' bodies was not simply being dictated by the language of the

play, because the interpretation of that language was infused with a variety of embodied, experiential evidence.

For example, one actor who played a member of the chorus of women in both the first and second acts spent the summer interning in New York City. She included in her performance an interview with a man discussing love, divorce and heartbreak, and later revealed that she had arranged an interview with Charles Mee. He agreed to an interview, but did not want to discuss the production itself or have any input in the way it was produced, and she did not reveal who the speaker was until after her performance was over. Consequently, the playwright's own feelings on the topics of the play were included among the words of all interviewees, and were given equal importance as those others. The actors could speak confidently about their opinions of what might be happening in various scenes and act as strong individuals, with full awareness that their individual subjectivity was directly tied up in the interaction of a larger group of people. And they could engage their imaginations and create new possible combinations of text, image, sound and movement while at the same time attempting to empathize closely with the experiential truth of the voices of their interviewees that made up the characters they were performing.

In the program notes for this production, Rebecca Hewett quoted Mee as saying that one one of his strategies is "to extend the boundaries of what's considered normal and acceptable for what it is for a human being to be" ("Shattered" 99). In the interview this quotation came from, Erin Mee writes that "People who have had no place in the conventional theatre, people who have been excluded from the mainstream, are put

onstage, given a platform from which to speak. And that, finally, is what is most important about my father's work. He makes room for the marginalized, the rejected, and the outsider" (87). Developing characters through a collage-like process which includes collecting interviews and devising an identity through the process of performing them makes it possible for actors to see the power they have to extend the boundaries of what reactions are appropriate and believable. In addition to understanding how their actions are formed by the material conditions in which their bodies find themselves, actors who use such a process might also consider how their work as performers can transform understanding and suggest new possibilities. In the following chapter, I discuss how this process is particularly suited to work that questions gender and sexuality in regards to identity.

Chapter Four
"It's Nice Hearing Your Voice:" Queering the Real and Naturalizing Theatricality as Ava Coo in *The Strip*

If history is to be creative, to anticipate a possible future without denying the past, it should, I believe, emphasize new possibilities by disclosing those hidden episodes of the past when, even if in brief flashes, people showed their ability to resist, to join together, occasionally to win. I am supposing, or perhaps only hoping, that our future may be found in the past's fugitive moments of compassion rather than its solid centuries of warfare.

- *Howard Zinn, from A People's History of the United States*

I thought I hated her a lot, but then she scratched my back and I felt, I don't know, a comfort, a safety, and it was confusing to me because I thought I hated her and ... well I mean it wasn't sexual or nothing 'cause, shit, what do I know about sex anyway? I'm just some chick who pretends to be a chick so people will look at me in a different light so Christ, you know, what's that about?

- Ava Coo, from Phyllis Nagy's The Strip

Anonymous drag performer: You're gonna play a female drag impersonator, right?

Me: I'm gonna play a fema … a female who's playing …

DP: … a man.

Me: No, a female who's playing a man who's playing a woman.

DP: Wait a minute … no, so you're playing a man who's a drag queen.

Me: I'm playing a girl who's playing a man who's a drag queen.

DP: Okay, that doesn't make any sense!

Me: Like Victor/Victoria style.

DP: Ohhhhh! You're playing … a girl … wait … you're playing a girl who's playing … a man … who's playing a woman. I get it. Okay. I don't understand this play. It must be very strange.

Me: It is very strange, but it's …

DP: But you're also creating a piece … a, like a, disser … a report or something?

Me: I'm creating a performance that's … basically I'm creating a character from a bunch of different interviews.

DP: And you're gonna use this character in this play.

Me: Exactly.

DP: But the play's already been written.

Me: Uh-huh!

DP: Okay.

Me: But the performance hasn't. It's a separate … It's a separate thing from the play. But … yeah. That's … that's what I'm doing.

- *from a telephone interview with a Los Angeles-based drag performer*

We got possibilities, little fella, endless possibilities.

- *Tina Coo, from <u>The Strip</u>*

Concocting an imagined persona (particularly while paying particular attention to gender) by piecing together a series of interactions with people and images—both fictional and real—is a theatrical and queer endeavor that involves desiring, fantasizing about, and eventually believing that one can take on the identity of a person entirely different than oneself. It is also human: everybody does it, even the most heterosexual and masculine of men. As a drag performer I interviewed in connection with this chapter phrased it, "I think a lot of boys, when they're young, they study the guys they wish they

were like, you know, the tough guys, and that whole tough guy thing is learned, it's not natural. It's from children studying the football players and the movie stars." This cobbling together of an identity requires the embodied work and energy of re-enactment and imitation, and it also relies on the great physical pleasure and joy of interacting with, observing closely and listening to other people's bodies. It is theatrical, and at the same time "does something;" it is both entertaining *and* serious business, imaginative and real.

In this chapter, I theorize how my own work building the identity of Ava Coo in Phyllis Nagy's *The Strip* through re-enacting pieces of a series of interviews in the framework of a solo collage-like portrait of her character was an attempt to naturalize queerness, difference, and theatricality as universally human qualities. At the same time, I hope to reveal how the same process queers the traditionally "bourgeois humanist" and masculinist process of building a nation that *does* something. Ultimately, I am suggesting that universalizing queerness is the key to achieving Hardt and Negri's idea of a Multitude that works to embody a world that embraces difference, pleasure and love rather than money and private property.

Theatre is Okay for Girls

Since modernism shifted the focus from deities and more-than-human monarchs to other "regular" human beings as models for behavior, actors have become increasingly important sources from which people learn how to shape and move their bodies in accordance with the laws of masculinity or femininity. Consequently, the actual tools used by actors to create public personae and fictional characters are among the most significant means of spreading ideologies of gender. During the spring semester of 2002,

as I was preparing to play Mr. Darling and Captain Hook in the U.T. Department of Theatre and Dance production of *Peter Pan*, I went to buy a Ben Nye makeup kit (the standard makeup used by most actors), as suggested by the department's costume area. I stood at the counter at *The Bazaar*, a costume shop in south Austin, and looked in awe at the array of false eyelashes and beautiful wigs styled into complicated up-dos, and thought that this must, without saying so on the sign, be a shop for drag queens and strippers, built to suit the needs of those who wanted to convert their usual bodies into over-the-top femaleness by adorning them with the glittering equipment of their trades.

I asked the man behind the counter for the size kit I could afford (transforming one's body comes at no cheap price), and he looked through his stock until he found the one most clearly suited for me: the one with "white female" marked boldly on the side in black sharpie. "How odd," I thought, "that the reason I'm buying this kit from this store is to better convert my white female body into two different white males." It made me think about all of the tools I use as an actor and the assumptions behind those tools: how putting them on, like makeup, is usually geared towards helping me reproduce the particular categories of gender and race to which my body dictates I am most suited; and how knowing this might just make it possible for me to actually use the tools I have to question and subvert the rules of the identity I might be expected to take on rather than reinforcing them.

In the previous chapter I dealt with the broader pedagogical implications of using this interview-based "experiential" process with actors working on a play that was about nationalism and colonization in a time of war and the effects such concepts and events

have on people's gendered bodies. Through experimenting with this interview-and-solo-performance based process from the position of director while working on *The Trojan Women*, I started to get some idea of what kinds of meanings it produced while I considered the overall picture of the production. But, as an actor, I also wanted to try the process on my own body: I wanted to see if and how working in this way felt different from my usual set of tools. I have an ongoing investment in addressing the problem Lauren Love raises in her essay "Resisting the 'Organic': A Feminist Actor's Approach":

> As a feminist actor, my performance experiences in conventional theatre grow increasingly frustrating, because my corporeal presence within its representational frames demands my complicity with an ideology I seek to resist. … Given this, how do I reconcile my politics with my work as an actor in conventional theatre? (275)

While the previous experiment with this process was focused on pedagogy and training (the actors were all undergraduate students, many of them theatre majors, and so I was positioned as something like a teacher as well as the director of the production), I also wondered how I could begin to propose this process as a supplementary one for individual actors working in more traditional rehearsal environments. That is, I wanted to see how it might be meaningful or helpful when used in a context that was not dedicated exclusively to working with community-based interviewing and solo performance in order to see what problems might arise for actors who are interested in making their professional work more socially engaged. While the work I did was not in a professional

context, in this chapter I begin to examine how an individual actor might use this multi-faceted process as a means of critiquing normative rules of gender and sexuality.

After I had begun to take interest in this ethnographic/oral history/solo performance approach to training actors, a colleague of mine in the PhD program at The University of Texas, Chase Bringardner, announced that he would be directing Phyllis Nagy's play *The Strip* as a Laboratory Theatre production. As was the case with the mostly cross-gender cast production of *Peter Pan* I mentioned above, the opportunity to work on this particular play was in part a result of my placement in the recently established Performance as Public Practice program at UT. Because the director was a student in the same doctoral program of which I was a part, he shared my interests in finding new ways to combine critical theory and performance practice, and was extremely cooperative and encouraging regarding the work I was doing. I went through the audition process with other people, but was also able to explain my reasoning for wanting to play the part of Ava Coo: the role of a woman who dreams of a successful career as a drag queen coincided particularly well with my research interests.

I mention this because in some sense, my own subjectivity has been formed in an environment that directly inverts the typical problem for women working in professional theatre. If an actor is typically imagined as merely a vehicle for the words and ideas of a playwright, she is often limited to reproducing certain kinds of roles in the interest of making money. I was in an academic situation in which people were devoted to questions of identity, social engagement and the role of artists as public intellectuals, and so in some ways the development of this process acting was the result of the ideological

framework with which I was surrounded. At the same time, I *chose* this particular program because of questions and concerns I already had about acting and being an actor.[7] Like Stanislavski, then, whose experiments with acting were inspired by problems presented by the dramaturgy and content of particular plays but whose interests extended well beyond those contexts, I am assuming that this way of working can be adapted for use on plays with other kinds of content and form, and will produce different meanings together with those texts. In other words, I see myself both as a product of my given circumstances and an agent trying to turn what I have learned into an emergent set of tools that is transmissible to other contexts.

Phyllis Nagy is certainly an appropriate playwright to choose to provide a literary framework within which to explore a process that is concerned with negotiating boundaries in global geographic terms as well as in terms of gender politics and queer

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[7] Again, it was significant that this was a Lab production, outside the purview of the regular production season in the Theatre and Dance Department: this project was situated more "outside" the realm of the regular production season than *The Trojan Women* had been. The Laboratory Theatre was used during the day as a classroom and in the evenings as a performance venue. But, unlike the Payne and Brockett Theatres that were dedicated to training students on a professional track (usually MFA designers, directors and actors, and undergraduate theatre majors) a significant portion of the Lab's season was set aside for experimental student productions. These productions received no financial support from the department, but there was an application process and productions had to be approved by a faculty committee. In a sense, the Lab was the "Off-Broadway" or even "Off-Off Broadway" venue of the department, whose pedagogical function was less professional in nature and therefore made room for a wider range of script choices, experimentation in production practices and in-depth intellectual investigations of a different kind than might happen in an official departmental production.

theory. Nagy was born in New York but took up permanent residence in London as a writer for the Royal Court Theatre in the early 1990s, and so questions of national identity and traveling between countries or cities (as well as across time) are significant in her work. In addition, Elaine Aston places her historically among young British women playwrights who, while they represent lesbian characters in their work, are involved in questioning the idea of identity based on sexuality or gender. Aston contrasts Nagy with playwright Bryony Lavery, whose ongoing concern has been with lesbian and gay politics, writing that, "Nagy, on the other hand, tends to contest gay and feminist orthodoxies in the interests of stirring up gender trouble. Her theatre is less about claiming an identity than exploring the possibilities that arise when identity gets displaced" (100). Nagy's play is, in this sense, aligned with the theories of materialist feminism and queer activism, for which, as Dolan writes, "The assertion of identity is not the goal, as it is in feminist identity politics, but a point of departure for a multivalent, shifting ground of subjectivity….Identity becomes a site of struggle, at which the subject organizes and reorganizes competing discourses as they fight for supremacy" (*Feminist Spectator* 88). For an actor this poses a compelling challenge: how does a person who is supposedly in the business of *building* an identity work on a script that is about taking identities apart?

In this chapter, I describe my approach to constructing Ava Coo, a character whose life is shaped by her experimental performance of gender, her ongoing need to become an individual person of significance with something important to say, and—surprisingly enough to her—her body's desire for physical comfort, pleasure and love.

Through the work I did on this character, I started to recognize how my interest in this process of character development was influenced by my background in feminist theory, gender performativity and camp, and also by queer sexuality; I noticed a number of ways in which developing a character intertextually with regards to gender overlaps with the history of drag, specifically with the practice of men piecing together and performing a feminine identity that is ostensibly opposite their biological sex. As Esther Newton puts it, "The effect of the drag system is to wrench the sex roles loose from that which supposedly determines them, that is, genital sex. Gay people know that sex-typed behavior can be achieved, contrary to what is popularly believed. They know that the possession of one type of genital equipment by no means guarantees the 'naturally appropriate' behavior" (21). *The Strip* makes clear how this practice can be useful, also, as a feminist practice: it begins with a telling line from the play's mysterious catalyst, Otto Mink: "Female impersonation is a rather curious career choice for a woman, Miss Coo." Ava Coo, a woman who dreams of a career as a drag queen, is driven by a desire to succeed, but her particularly queer variety of "success" is in some ways determined by the ambiguously gendered dictates of her body:

> I don't really look like a girl. I'm too … something. I mean, I got big tits but they look fake, or so this guy from Hoboken told me. I went to beauty school with this drag queen, Tina, and I think I kind of look like her so … so. It was this or Star Search. I figure the TV camera doesn't lie, but maybe a smoky scuzzy club full of drunken queens will (185).

Because her *actual* body doesn't fit the version of femininity sold by the television as "real," she learns to choose an environment in which her failure to be a typically beautiful, feminine woman works in her favor. So while she is technically the "right" sex to play a woman, she borrows the practice of drag as a means of pointing out that even most *women* have to perform their gender in one way or another.

In preparation for playing the role of Ava Coo, I hoped to see what happened if I attempted consciously (and also in some ways unconsciously) to construct her through a series of "real" interactions with people whose experiences intersected with her fictional ones, rather than relying exclusively on abstract or consistent ideas of who her character might be psychologically. My interviewing process was based on themes from the play that I wanted to explore through the development of this character: drag performance/gender performativity—an examination of hybridity and border-crossing regarding gender and sexuality; and a more literal discussion of travel and border crossing involving people who had been on road trips. My starting point for these interviews was less than ideal, as far as community-based processes go. I didn't have a specific community whose issues the performance was attempting to address. But my attempts to find people to participate in the project reflected Ava Coo's meetings and interactions in the play: I found the people with whom I would work by chance. I sent emails explaining the process, and the people who responded were colleagues, friends, or friends of friends. One was a colleague who had traveled to Slovenia and crossed the border to Croatia; another was a friend whose experiences intersected with both questions: she worked in the sex industry and, while she had previously considered

herself somewhat "butch," learned to put on femininity as a costume. She had also undertaken a long road trip across country that she considered a kind of "coming of age" experience. The other two were drag performers: one whose work I was able to see in person, and the other (with whom I was put in touch by a person responding to a mass email) who lives in Los Angeles and has a very specific character he had been performing for years. By building Ava Coo through my interactions with these people, I intended to create, with my body, a person who was not driven by one consistent thing but multiple, contradictory ones; and who was not successful in conforming to an "idea" of identity, but was constantly changing and becoming something different through her historical interactions with other people.

Nationhood, Gender and "Acting"

Inspired by Elin Diamond's theory of identity as a history of identifications, the interview-and-solo-performance based process I discuss is dedicated to re-imagining actors' bodies using a model that is multivocal, always in process, and a means of emphasizing the interaction of various people who comprise one person's identity. I was also inspired by reading Howard Zinn's *The People's History of the United States* and *The Voices of the People's History of the United States*, in which he writes the history of this country that emphasizes the internal conflicts and interaction among different classes of people that make up the nation; he also offers pieces of the experiential stories of the

people involved in those interactions.[8] Near the beginning of *The People's History*, Zinn writes that "The colonies, it seems, were societies of contending classes—a fact obscured by the emphasis, in traditional histories, on the external struggle against England, the unity of colonists in the Revolution. The country therefore was not 'born free,' but born slave and free, servant and master, tenant and landlord, poor and rich" (50). The writing of history, it seems, often focuses on external conflict between supposedly unified nations in much the same way that traditional actor training in the United States emphasizes conflicting desires between individual characters. If identity politics based on gender and sexuality can be understood to classify people according to gender and sexual practice as a way of struggling against an external "dominant" straight white masculinist culture, materialist feminism and queer theory, in questioning categories of "Women," or "Men," "Gay," "Lesbian" or "Straight," addresses differences based on race and ethnicity, economic class and other elements of social existence within and among what were previously considered unified biological identities.

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[8] I might, of course, have chosen any of a number of political theorists, historians, anthropologists or sociologists writing about resistant practices, alternative nations or coalitional politics, but when I began working I was reminded that I had never read Zinn's books. I picked them up to read for pleasure and to redress this lack in my (typically American) history education, and found that they were entirely appropriate to what I wanted to say about acting. I am particularly drawn to Zinn because of his populist approach and the generosity of his writing: he writes history *for* the people about whom he writes in a way that is broadly accessible. I have also chosen him because of his reputation as both a 1960s-era political activist who resists from the "outside" *and* a best-selling author who has learned to work within the contemporary capitalist system of exchanging information.

The usual understanding of Stanislavski-based acting relies on a humanist concept of internally-based, stable identity and action that is akin to theories of nationalism, and that view of acting in association with realist dramaturgy has been questioned (as I have pointed out in previous chapters) most frequently by Marxist scholars and feminists, whose goals as theater scholars and artists are analogous to Zinn's attempts to give voice to under-represented or misrepresented populations. I am proposing that actors might imagine that the way Zinn writes history—admitting the existence of a nation called the United States that is engaged in struggles against other nations, but focusing on the difference within that nation—might be akin to their process of building a seemingly individual character (who is eventually engaged externally with other characters) through their bodies. Using metaphors of the body for national and political purposes is nothing new: people speak of the "body politic" for example, and the "health of the state" or "the long arm of the law." My interest is in turning those metaphors around: considering each actor's individual body as what once might have been seen as a separate nation, but also proposing an understanding of the actor's body that reflects somewhat of a contemporary global humanist—and ultimately queer—understanding. That is, I want to propose that the actor's body can reflect a new metaphor that transforms the rigid boundaries of containment to more fluid and interactive concepts, and at the same time preserves the strength of claiming human agency.

Gender and sexuality are both important identifying factors determining the modernist "with us or against us" construction that defined (and in many ways still defines) the United States as a nation. In order to live within the protective container of

Americanism and participate in the prosperity of this country, men and women need to look and behave a certain way. The idea of America as a container for people who possess certain characteristics, hold defined set of values, and behave in a particular way works well in the service of colonization and control: "America desires this country's resources. This country's population is culturally different than most Americans, and is resistant to being taken over. America has to use two tactics: active physical force and domination, and deception to convince this population of their similarity to 'all people.'" I have deliberately used the term "tactics," which is typical language of "acting," here, because it is not only the process of defining a nation's boundaries and creating an identity that is exclusionary and destructive, but also what that nation *does* in relationship to people who do not live within its protective container that perpetuates suffering and inequality. Nationalism requires a somewhat theatrical process of manufacturing an identity and making that nation's existence believable, and at the same time calls for the mobilization of that identity—*doing* something—with a particular goal in mind.

Because it results in deliberate and unreflective action against "outsiders," the containment metaphor requires anyone who doesn't wish to accept his or her own "sameness" to take a deliberate stance of resistance *outside* of the dominant and exert a great deal of effort resisting its attempts to either incorporate or destroy his or her identity. The recent debates over marriage are a perfect example of this issue: a recent *New York Times* article began with the sentence "New Jersey's highest court ruled on Wednesday that gay couples are entitled to the same legal rights and financial benefits as heterosexual couples, but split over whether their unions must be called marriage or could

be known by another name, handing that question to the Legislature" (http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/25/nyregion/26marriagecnd.html). The idea that *marriage* is "normal" and therefore legally reserved only for people who remain within the bounds of properly gendered heterosexual behavior is an attempt to preserve the rules that determine what is or is not a legitimately American way to behave. It seems like a small matter, but has major performative consequences: gays and lesbians are forced into a sort of "separate but equal" situation if they wish to participate in certain legal and financial benefits, and as a result reinforce the concept that there *is* an "inside" and "outside," a "normal" and "abnormal," that makes discriminatory thoughts and practices still viable. The laws regulating gender and sexuality are, of course, the central concerns of feminist and queer activists whose lives are directly affected by how gendered and sexualized bodies and their activities are perceived and controlled. Women, lesbians, bisexuals, gay men, transgendered people, and in general people who define themselves as "queer" are among the marginalized groups who are historically under- or misrepresented, and whose interests and physical and emotional wellbeing frequently continue to suffer by their perceived lack of agency in the writing of history and shaping of the world.

Actors, as I have pointed out in earlier chapters, are also overlooked as potential historical agents: in some sense, actors' marginalized social status and their close historical association with the body and sexuality marks them as queer or, to a certain extent, feminizes them. "Men act," says Ray Bob in the first act of Charles Mee's *The Trojan Women,* "We know this. Attach no value to it, particularly. To act is to be. No

more, no less." This concept—naturalizing deliberate, immediate and unreflective action and making it seem necessary to masculine identity—is repeated again in the second act when Aeneas says to Dido, "Men are meant to DO something, or else they just never existed." The word "act," in this case, refers to the exertion of power in expectation of an effect, or, as Webster's dictionary defines it, "to carry into effect the determination of will." This distinction is important to make, considering that the meaning of acting in the "Other" or theatrical sense, as Stephen Bottoms observes, connotes the opposite of virile masculinity;

> Theatre may be 'okay for girls,"—but, as is still apparent from the grossly disproportionate ratio of female to male applications to most theatre programs—it is simply not something that "real men" do. To act, to play a part, to dress up in tights is not properly manly, entailing as it does the 'unnatural' construction of a presentational artifice (such ostentation being traditionally assumed to be more 'naturally' the preserve of women). To be involved in theatre is—ergo—to be feminized, if not downright effeminate. (176).

Action in the Austinian performative sense, then— "real" acting—is work, and the purview of straight men, and "fake" acting in the theatre is the nonprocreative play of women and gay men. Again, the idea of who owns the "legitimate" or "real" is reinforced by a metaphoric structure that requires people to choose one identity-"performance" as action -or another-acting as "theatre."

If the practice of theatre itself can be thought of as existing outside of dominant culture and in that sense imagined as a separate nation or identity group, it is certainly a conflicted and queer one, full of all sorts of gender trouble on a theoretical plane. Stephen Bottoms contends that Theatre Studies, the more commercial and "entertaining" of the two camps, has recently been categorized as feminine and (in Richard Schechner's terms) "homosexual," and supposedly less than efficacious, and Performance Studies is seen as more masculine in its association with action and change. But it is Theatre and its association with the Method's allegiance to authenticity and action that is often masculinized within academia, and with which many feminist and queer theorists have taken issue. The primary concept of identity in the theatre in a traditional sense is usually thought to be the human being as a "desiring machine," as Colin Counsell elegantly phrased it, taking action based on his or her needs—much like the men in Mee's play who were meant to DO something. However the real "truth" of the character's actions is understood to originate in the *words* of the playwright rather than in the body of the actor. In feminist and psychoanalytic terms, then, the actor is feminized in his or her association with feeling and the body, but—as was clarified by the forum of actors in the first chapter—it is the playwright's words that shape the body into its "authentic" form, and it is the playwright who makes change possible. The playwright is masculinized in his or her association with words and agency. In this case, the authenticity and realness of actors' performances serves to reinforce the illusion that people are free to shape their own identities, rather than to expose the pressures enforced by the social scripts inherited by virtue of their gender, race, ethnicity, sexual practice, etc. However, while in theatre

the playwright can be clearly identified as the author of the action and the actor as the person who carries out that script, in regular social situations the agent defining gender is less identifiable—who chooses and changes the given circumstances that are masculine and feminine qualities?

Considering the gendered aspects of *actor training* as a separate area of scholarship, the Performance Studies side is the one that takes on a more feminine cast: the kinds of training that have been embraced as "performance" are not couched in the masculinist and humanist language of objective, obstacle and action. In addition, Bottoms notes that queer theory has tended to side with Performance Studies (performance art by women and queer artists is rarely termed "theatre" although much of it takes place in theatres and uses theatrical elements), but he questions,

> whether or not gay and lesbian concerns have had, in effect, to present themselves as dynamically subversive of the ruling order in order to find this accommodation within our disciplinary paradigms. This is not to say that homosexuality is not always, to some degree, subversive in a heterosexual world. Yet there is, perhaps, a certain pressure to dress up in macho drag, to appear queerly virile (183).

As I noted in previous chapters, many of the precursors to Performance Studies in the realm of experimental theatre—groups like Schechner's own Performance Group, Beck and Malina's Living Theatre and Joseph Chaikin and The Open Theatre—dealt more often with "physical actor training" that emphasizes ensemble playing and physical

movement, and avoid psychological analysis. They placed an emphasis on the body rather than playwrights' words as the source of the "real." Their inspiration in the realm of dramatic theory—Artaud and Grotowski—while they themselves were men, took interest in the ritualistic elements of theatre and felt that the reliance on the "logos" of canonical masterpieces had to be eliminated in order to access truth. Often, queer theorists associated with performance studies and performance art focus on the body as a source of change, action and transformation and devalue plays. Who and what, then, is feminine and who and what is masculine within actor training? Is action and change feminine and queer, or is it masculine and heterosexual? Is the deliberate construction of identity always gay, or does *everyone* engage in that theatrical practice? Gender is all mixed up, here, and the answers to these questions become merely a matter of how one frames experience.

My interest in pointing out all of these contradictions within theoretical applications of gender to theatre and performance is not to prove or disprove any of them, nor to offer a new way of assigning gender to theatre/performance or actors themselves. Rather, I mean to point out that the "undefining" of gender and sexuality that happens when one looks more closely at how people choose to call certain elements of theatre or performance masculine or feminine reveals why the realm of acting is fertile ground for re-framing conversations about gender. This chapter introduces the possibility that the "experiential" and interactional process of actor training in which I am interested serves to destabilize gender by productively combining elements of both the theoretical "masculine" and "feminine." At the same time, because it involves a *physical* interaction,

in some sense this process puts the "sex" back into gender; it allows for the possibility that *physical* desire—not only desire in a Freudian sense of libidinous drives (although that is undoubtedly important sometimes), but the desire for one's body to experience the pleasure of love, security and comfort rather than simply conflict and the power of "winning"—often drive a character's choice of how he or she performs gender.

The Body as a Given Circumstance

Throughout the 1960s and 70s, what Jill Dolan defines as cultural or "radical" feminism connected femininity directly with biology and valorized women's bodies: "Cultural feminists … elide the difference between sex and gender. In their analysis, the biological basis of women's difference from men—primarily focused on their reproductive capabilities—gives rise to a formulation of femininity as innate and inherently superior to masculinity" (*Feminist Spectator* 6). Cultural feminism, then, was a kind of alternative nationalism that celebrated the feminine body as a site of a stable and identifiable gender identity. Judith Butler is perhaps the most oft-cited theorist who focuses specifically on the performativity of gender and sexuality, or how the rules governing "men" and "women," "straight," "gay," and "lesbian" are reproduced through bodies *doing* actions according to certain juridical formations. Initially, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler proposed a definition of gender as the social iteration of sex; she called it the

> stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender

> ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender. (33)

She maintains that if the illusion of naturalness is revealed to be the result of various interacting coercive systems, one might introduce a subversive variation in the repeated acts that constitute gender. In other words, gender is not biological but an elaborate social performance. But while it is not "natural," gender is nonetheless "policed"—the choices one has in performing gender are limited by the social expectations placed on a person because of her biological sex. Choosing to defy those expectations carries consequences. Drag is possible, then, but its subversion of the rules of dominant ideology marks one as "excessive" or "theatrical" or an "outsider."

In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler expands on her complicated thesis to clarify some questionable issues: first, she acknowledges that, as a person trained in the field of philosophy, she has in the past spoken of the body abstractly, avoiding what theatre scholar Stanton Garner, in *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama*, terms the "problematic facticity" of physical presence. She acknowledges a problem with considering gender as purely a social phenomenon: "the social construction of the natural presupposes the cancellation of the natural by the social" (*Bodies* 5), and it is the "natural," the biological body, with which femininity has been traditionally aligned (and consequently *ma*ligned). Butler's concept of performativity engages closely with psychoanalysis, linguistics and poststructuralism in

order to grapple with the "inside/outside" binary with regards to gender, and she emphasizes that Irigaray's concerns were with the fact that "women," as a category, are historically the unintelligible Other—the Lacanian "lack"—that must be colonized, defined and spoken for by the masculine "Logos." In terms of the "containment" metaphor outlined by Lakoff and Johnson and applied to Cold War theatre by Bruce McConachie, the feminine in its location outside the container of a masculine "norm" poses a threat, as the body poses a threat because it has traditionally been understood to rest outside of the realm of logic, and presupposes movement and change.

While Butler herself brackets theatre in her discussion of gender performativity, I cite her at length because her concerns and arguments extend the issues for actors I have been discussing into the realm of gender and sexuality, and also reiterate the questions I have been exploring thus far. Trained as a philosopher, she might seem able to sidestep the actual materiality of the body that seems to exist whether or not it is "intelligible" in a theoretical sense, an actor must always deal with the matter of the body directly, both before (in training) and during (in rehearsal and performance) the process of fitting it into a set of "compulsory frames." In the introduction to *Bodies That Matter*, Butler states that "If gender is the social construction of sex, and if there is no access to this sex except by means of its construction, then it appears not only that sex is absorbed by gender, but that 'sex' becomes something like a fiction, perhaps a fantasy, retroactively installed at a prelinguistic site to which there is no direct access" (5). The practice for actors (although their bodies have likely been inscribed with a particular gender), is the opposite of what Butler describes … the play's words are clearly the "fiction," the imagined possibility,

but their "real" physical bodies undeniably exist prior to the circumstances of the play into which they must be fit. It was this problem … how to *willfully* shape the body to fit the words that created a character … with which Stanislavski began to grapple, for example. For the actor, the body is an obvious, messy, unwieldy and problematic fact, and how best to cope with that fact in the context of a script of one kind or another is what his or her intellectual and physical project involves. As Elin Diamond points out, this is why theatre can be such a powerful place for examining the processes and rules of gender and sexuality.

The idea of a unified identity is both upheld and belied by the presence of a live body. In an essay entitled "Identity's Body," Sidonie Smith addresses the idea of autobiography and bodies, posing the question "What does skin have to do with autobiography and autobiography with skin?" (267). She writes,

> … the body only seems to anchor us in a finite, discrete, unified surround—a private surround, temptingly stable and impermeable. There is only apparent continuity since, paradoxically, bodies, at once so close to us as to seem indissoluble from a notion of "me" or "I," can also disrupt the too-easy stability of singular identities (Martin 81). The bodily home can be an illusive terrain, perhaps the home of a stranger. If it is only apparently continuous with our identity or identification as an individual, then the politics of the body can open up a space of contradiction, drift, homelessness, a gap through which a complex heterogeneity destabilizes our sense of any stable identification. (267)

Smith's description, here, coincides closely with Antonio Damasio's understanding of body as an "organic whole," which is different than the "commodity" concept of unity. That is, human beings have bodies, and our bodies are, to some degree, similar: they are the same in their difference and interconnectedness. Each body is a system that lives, breathes and changes, sometimes contradicting itself, and is part of a larger interactive system that is also moving and changing.

Pleasure, Desire and the Invention of Self in *The Strip*

The Strip and the interviewing process with which I am beginning to experiment hinge on what seems to be a particularly queer question about the presence of the body for an actor: what role does physical pleasure and desire—both sexual and otherwise—play in both invention of self and the inevitable ongoing changes of the body? In addition to gender performativity, the concept of the materiality and pleasure of people's bodies with relation to queer sexuality is essential to the question of how this process of acting allows for the possibility of human agency without lapsing back into the ideals of bourgeois humanism or capitalist models of power and success. Essentially, the idea is that one's body can and does find physical pleasure and comfort in embodied exchanges with other people ("I love to listen to your voice"), and that it can be the biological (and human) drive toward this pleasure (as opposed to interpellation into dominant ideology) that often compels one's performance of identity.

The structure of Nagy's play replaces the cause-and-effect logic of realism with a dramaturgy of chance combined with embodied desire. Each character is on a journey set in motion by Otto Mink, but the paths they take change somewhat based on the people

they meet along the way and, importantly, the physical reactions they have to those people.[9] Aston points out that *The Strip* bothered critics because it evaded their attempts

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[9] The opening montage of the play emphasizes the interconnectedness of all the characters' lives, and at the same time makes clear the importance and difference of live theatre. While in a film montage each location would likely be shown in sequence, all activities in all locations—London, Las Vegas, Long Island; nightclubs, casinos and apartments—are seen at once. On the small lab theatre stage, this might have had a "global" effect, showing how each individual scene and location connected with all of the others. In addition, scenes in *The Strip* are not intended to follow one after the other with clear distinctions in between. Nagy writes that "Scenes should begin and end in overlap; that is, except where indicated, there is never a blackout and the action of those on stage is continuous. It is possible that the physical action of any scene begins before its preceding scene ends, and so on" (182). The setting as Nagy describes it is supposed to be "A fluid, non-naturalistic landscape dominated by an enormous three-dimensional re-creation of Sphinx and pyramid which represents the exterior of the Luxor Hotel, Las Vegas, Nevada. It never leaves the stage" (183). Since there was no budget for set design or construction in our production, the reference to the Luxor Hotel and direct image of Las Vegas did not dominate the production. The "fluid, non-naturalistic landscape" was easily possible, however, and because of the small, intimate stage and the bare minimum set, the effect was an emphasis on the close interconnectedness of people's lives and

to summarize its plot, and both she and Michael Coveney (who wrote the introduction to Nagy's collection *Plays: I*) draw parallels between the related-but-separate plot lines of Nagy's writing and that of Shakespeare. As Aston emphasizes, however, while Shakespeare's comedies strive for harmony and re-establishment of order at the end, *The Strip* takes apart the normal order and shakes it up so people make different, new, and unexpected connections, so that when they finally come together in the same location at the end of the play, it is unclear what order will result from some of these reunions: all we are left with are "endless possibilities" and a great deal of hope for a different and better world.

What Aston calls the undoing of the characters' identities I would define as the kind of complication and depth that begins with the pleasure of physical interaction and develops into deeper connections that result in transformation. This is not to say that the characters abandon their notions of identity: it is impossible for them to completely disregard the cultural scripts that have been written for them or the roles they have imagined for themselves. But what Lakoff and Johnson might call the "experiential evidence" of their bodies' interactions or what Elin Diamond might refer to as their "history of identifications" transform the templates of their identities into something

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experiences despite the fact that story lines take place in different parts of the world. The context of the production highlighted both the global/international themes of the script (the way people's relationships can exist across geographic and historical borders) and the physical ones (the way people's identities are changed by direct interaction with the physical bodies of other people).

more inclusive and complex. When Loretta and the handsome Tom meet in his jewelry shop, for example, she has him place her engagement ring on back on her finger after he has examined it and suggested that it is not a real diamond. He does so, and the mere physical performance of that act "makes her day": the memory of her husband having done the same brings her great pleasure, and she begins a close connection with Tom. Loretta—whose husband Lester has grown "mean" and is intolerant, racist and homophobic—doesn't discover until later that Tom is gay, by which time the two have become fast friends. The interaction of their two bodies – and the comfort, strength and pleasure that connection brings them—changes both for the better; the two remain different, but can make a human, empathic and ultimately *physical* connection that allows them to live with and enjoy that difference. Loretta even invites Tom home with her to open his own beauty salon and capitalize on his difference: "There's no gay running a beauty salon in Roanoke, Tom, believe me. It'd be kinda like a monopoly" (250).

Lester Marquette, Loretta's fugitive husband, begins the play staring at "a couple of homos" whose activities he can see through the window of his hotel room. In another compelling turn of events, he meets one of the homos—Tom's obnoxiously dominating partner Martin, who suffers from a mysterious illness that may explain why he is obsessed with controlling his body through exercise—at a bar. Nagy effectively queers southern "old boy" culture in this scene, as Tom, unaware that he has stumbled into a gay bar, compares it to his favorite watering hole at home, "the only place in the entire Shenandoah Valley where a fella can hook up with his buddies, take a break from the missus and the kids. Relax. Shoot some pool" (207). The two strike up a physical

relationship in which Martin consistently demonstrates his physical power over Lester: he beats him at arm wrestling, he grabs his testicles as he forces him into a painful weight-lifting session, and, eventually, he grabs and kisses him. Later, the typically homophobic and violently racist Lester admits the power that Martin (whose political views conflict with his own, but who shares Lester's intense devotion to masculinity) has gained over him: "I can't leave Martin. I hate him, but every time I get up to walk out that door, I think, hey, man, you gotta do a few more dishes or there's dust under the couch I got to clean up. … I wanna strangle him and kind of like, you know, hang out with him … All at the same time (251).

Ava Coo's transformation happens in a similar way. From the beginning, she is driven by her desire to succeed as a female impersonator, and goes on a journey to find a club called Tumbleweed Junction, where the mysterious Otto Mink has suggested she might find her calling despite her lack of "talent." She travels with Calvin Higgins, a lovestruck man obsessed with representations of history, who is ostensibly there to repossess her car but ends up calling her attention to what it means to have someone—Kate, specifically, as well as her mother and Calvin himself— care about her.

The scenes between Ava Coo and her mother, Tina, are particularly compelling in this regard. Unbeknownst to Ava, Tina is working at Tumbleweed Junction, her ultimate destination, as a cleaning lady. While Ava is on her trek across the country, the two speak once over the telephone, but according to Ava have a shaky connection. While Tina is in her trailer in Las Vegas, Ava is at Kate Buck's apartment halfway across the country, but the two are both visible to the audience. Nagy gives the stage direction that the activities

the two are performing as they speak on the phone—Tina chopping vegetables and Ava drinking whiskey—intensify over the course of the conversation. The strong physical relationship between mother and daughter is emphasized in this scene, as Tina magically seems to know where her daughter is, how she is looking, and even what she is wearing, although Ava has made no mention of those things. Again, this exchange is a pleasureable one for Tina. She says to Ava, "It's nice hearing your voice." In fact, shortly after this conversation, Kate reveals that the phone has been out of commission for quite a while—the connection the two had was made in some mysterious way.

In another scene, Ava and Calvin are standing at the side of the road as she sorts through outfits for her club act as Tina scrubs the floor and records a letter to Ava into a Dictaphone. The director of our production staged it so that we were on opposite sides of the stage, and as Tina's news of how things in her life had taken a turn for the worse intensified, Ava became more and more agitated and angry in her conversation with Calvin, suggesting that she and her mother have a strong connection that somehow defies physical distance. It is at the end of this scene that Calvin points out Ava's major flaw: "Why do you never notice when people care for you, Ava?" (246). Ava's transformation—learning to accept how essential the people who care about her are to her identity—begins with this scene.

While Ava's performance of gender begins as a desire for fame and a nebulous kind of "success" at being somebody who people pay to see perform, the more she travels and learns and fails to achieve her financial goals, her predetermined ideas of who she is fall apart. Through experience, she begins to understand her need for and the

transformative power of physical desire and connection. Perhaps the most significant thing that happens in her travels is that Ava meets Kate Buck, who on first impression she pegs as a psychotic lesbian. Based on what she has learned should be her reaction to such a person, Ava immediately decides she hates Kate, but at the end of the play's first act the two make a physical connection that confuses Ava's initial reactions. She explains at the end of the play,

> I thought I hated her a lot, but then she scratched my back and I felt, I don't know, a connection, a safety, and it was confusing to me because I thought I hated her, and … I mean it wasn't sexual or nothin', because… aw, fuck, what do I know about sex anyway? I'm just some chick who pretends to be a chick so people'll look at me in a different light, so, Christ, you know, what's *that* about? (258)

It is through her connection with Kate's body, and the surprising, unexpected comfort and sexual desire she gains from it, that Ava becomes a different person. She begins to learn that fulfillment, identity, approval and love, don't come from achieving some perfect ideal of success, but from accepting real contact with other people. The traces of her past interactions – with her mother, Kate, Calvin, the drag queen Tina who inspired her search for a career – are all contained in her body and in combination create her (ever changing) identity. Combining queer desire with a more global, humanist concept of the body bases the agency through which gender identity is often compelled on pleasure and love rather than on productivity, mainstream acceptance or financial growth.

Identification, then, is less sinister when it is based in joy or comfort rather than exploitation and unchecked capitalism that puts money and power in the hands of a few.

Constructing an Identity Through Imagination and Action

The question of agency is important in Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter*: who controls the iterations and re-iterations of gender? She writes,

> If gender is a construction, must there be an 'I' or a 'we' who enacts or performs that construction? How can there be an activity, a constructing, without presupposing an agent who precedes and performs that activity? How would we account for the motivation and direction of construction without such a subject? (7)

This question is one that was crucial in postmodern identity-based art: how can a person shaped by a number of conflicting discourses still assert subjectivity and identity? Does the supposedly dominant class, for whose benefit the existing rules of gender, class, sexuality, etc. are theoretically formed, exercise some kind of will or desire in creating the "regulatory frames" through which gender is made legible? Does anyone have a choice in how one's subjectivity is defined and one's body is shaped? Can *wanting* to be a particular gender, for example, make it possible to do so? Butler proposes a redefinition of the substance of the body "not as a site or a surface, but as *a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*" (9). That effect, she later points out, is the consequence of power and discourse, which, while they don't actually fix or reify anything, always produce the *circumstances* for later action (in other words, the historical situation that provides the context and basis

for action) and the terms by which that action is readable. Ultimately, she advocates a dialectical understanding of gendered bodies that is comparable to Raymond Williams' call to consider works of art as processes rather than objects, but she recognizes that the eventual "effect of boundary and surface" is key to setting the parameters for action.

As many scholars who critique Stanislavski-based acting have noted, the believability and authenticity that serve to obscure the "process of materialization" Butler describes is also what characterizes the psychological methods of training with which most actors in the United States are familiar. As Phillip Zarrilli writes, the valorization of "honesty" and "believability" in acting,

> …stems from the predominant viewpoint implicit in realistic acting that a character when enacted must conform to ordinary social reality as constructed from the spectator's point of view. The audience needs to be convinced that the character is behaving as s/he would in "ordinary life" within the "given circumstances" of the scene. (9)

There are numerous dangers in perpetuating the "bourgeois humanist" allegiance to both honesty and agency in acting, especially as it relates to gender. First, it naturalizes gendered behavior, makes it seem impossible to change, and absolves people of the responsibility they have in producing certain kinds of behavior. At the same time, it denies that people are beholden to the rules of gender: they seem to be actively choosing how they live, without any acknowledgement that choices falling outside the realm of "normal" might carry with them serious repercussions. Again, Zinn's work is useful, here, because as an anti-war activist, he analyzes how naturalizing gendered behavior is

used to justify war. In the documentary about him entitled *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, Zinn points out that many people easily accept the existence of war by citing "human nature" or by claiming that men are programmed to desire battle. He disagrees: *in his personal experience* as a bomber pilot in WWII, he says, none of the men were naturally driven by a desire to kill—it was the circumstances in which they found themselves living that led them to do so. While the repetition of the "script" and the laws for how men are expected to behave are eventually taken for granted as natural, fixed and arising from innate desire, the testimony given by people about their lived experience often reveals that gender and sexuality are more interactive processes. The dominant cultural rules defining men and women *exert pressure* to behave in particular ways, and repetition of that behavior makes their bodies take on particular shapes; but there can also be other, more forceful circumstances that pull their bodies in other directions. As a result, gendered behavior comes to mean something different on each person's body and in different historical situations depending upon what compels it.

But to a certain extent, it does seem that the illusion of unification and identity (no matter how provisional) makes it easier to take clear and direct action. Zinn points out that

> Around 1776, certain important people in the English colonies made a discovery that would prove enormously useful for the next two hundred years. They found that by creating a nation, a symbol, a legal unity called the United States, they could take over land, profits and political power from favorites of the British Empire. In the process, they could hold back

> a number of potential rebellions and create a consensus of popular support for the rule of a new, privileged leadership (58).

Zinn acknowledges that, putting the exclusionary and exploitive nature of this practice aside, latching on to the illusion of unity was an "act of genius" to a certain degree: it changed the course of history and transformed the world. His project, however, is to reveal the labor and the resistance on the part of the people whose labor was being exploited, but whose work *actually* built the nation. One can't help but wonder, reading his book, what might have happened if the African slaves, Indians and poor whites who were being manipulated and exploited had not been prevented from coalescing in a similar fashion and taking action against the class of men who had manufactured their control.

In suggesting a shift in actor training that emphasizes the multiple processes through which identity is created, in a fashion similar to Marxist historians or feminist critics, I do not mean to deny that some of the potential power of this method of working involves the step of allowing the multiple voices that make up a character's identity to coalesce, during performance, in a single actor's body. It is my hope that, while demanding consciousness of and respect for difference on the part of actors and the communities with whom they work, this methodology will also point out how the actor's creation of an individual character models a utopian performative, or what Zinn calls "fugitive moments of compassion;" it makes it possible to have faith in strength of presence and individual identity while still maintaining awareness of the complicated history that went into that presence.

In *The Strip*, it isn't simply the displacement of identity, but that "undoing" combined with the characters' intense need to imagine and create identities from which to speak and act that drives the play forward and makes possibility and transformation happen. Aston points out the significance of imagination, possibility and desire to all of the characters:

> All of Nagy's characters in *The Strip* have to live through second-hand identities that inadequately stand in for who they really are. While this is a conditioning force in their lives, they still have the freedom to be performative, to become other than they are. Tina fantasises that she has a real life with her husband and real contact with her daughter; Loretta transforms herself into Lady Marquette and takes off with Tom and Suzy. (103)

In the same way, Ava Coo wants to invent a persona for herself, and one that *chooses* where she goes and what she does. She bristles at Calvin's repetition of her poetic name, and insists that he abbreviate it to simply "Ava. A-V-A. Get it?" Her one-name persona has resonances with powerful pop (and drag) icons like Madonna, whose song "Rescue Me" provides the background for Ava's lip-synch at beginning of the play, and whose self-invention and re-invention were the basis for her postmodern success. In the same scene, on the road to Tumbleweed Junction, Ava asserts her individual choice to go on this trip, despite the fact that her supposed fate was set in motion by Otto Mink: "THIS IS MY TRIP. Okay? It's my trip, it's my car, it's my map, and we go where I say we go.

And we are going south. As soon as I can figure out why my friggin' car won't start" (202).

While deterministic forces such as fate (Suzy has a fascination with astrology), destiny (Mr. Mink's mysterious appearance in all character's lives leads them to their ultimate destination: Las Vegas), courts of law (Lester and Loretta are fugitives from the law because of his participation in a murder), malfunctioning cars and unreadable maps are balanced with courageous moments of exercising what Aston would call "the freedom to be performative." Interestingly, the deliberate claims of identity in order to *do something* are most pronounced in American characters like Ava Coo and Loretta. When Suzy, Tom and "Lady Marquette" arrive on the steps of an abandoned law court (where perform their own ceremony of justice), they have the following exchange:

> Loretta: Whatcha scared of sugar? We're alive and kicking and there ain't a thing can touch us now.
>
> Suzy: How can you be so sure of that?
>
> Loretta: I believe.
>
> Suzy: In what?
>
> Loretta: In my belief.

> Tom: She's got a point, Suzy. I haven't been afraid of anything since, well, since I've met Lady Marquette. (232)

While the characters in this play are queer in their resistance to normative socially-assigned identities, they also reveal a stereotypically American truculence that is productive and active, defining identity in the same sense that Zinn describes the "genius" of defining a nation. These assertions of identity involve acting in both senses: they pretend or imagine in the theatrical sense, and actively do something in the Austinian sense of performance.

Building the A-V-A Monopolylogue

Part of the reason the step of creating a separate performance is important in this process is because it is a solo and often autobiographical practice that centers around asserting identity, but also one that is associated closely with queer identity politics and an emphasis on the performer's live body. Jill Dolan terms solo performances in which one actor performs multiple characters on his or her own body "monopolylogues," a practice she writes about in an effort to show how it might "reanimate a humanism that can incorporate love, hope and commonality alongside a deep understanding of difference" (64). She points out that the form "models the fluidity of cultural identities and offers a method through which performers and spectators might experience them" (67). Dolan's analysis focuses on Lily Tomlin and Danny Hoch, who perform multiple characters that are based on people in their memories, but who are fictional creations borne of their imaginations, and Anna Deavere Smith, whose performances juxtapose

numerous "real" people's experiences through her individual body. While Hoch and Tomlin express great affection for their characters and hope that audiences share in that palpable love, Dolan points out that Deavere Smith's "gesture toward radical humanism comes through a politics of coalition that admits to the pain and the suffering of difference before love can be entertained as an emotion" (85). My creating a solo "monopolylogue" of Ava Coo before the character interacted with others through conflict, desire or love in the context of the play was intended to model—in the same way that Howard Zinn represents the difference and resistance, courage and cooperation of unrepresented classes of Americans—the complexity of a living human being.

After I conducted all four interviews, I put them together into a scripted performance that I designed to be performed in a particular classroom in the Winship Building that houses UT's Theatre and Dance Department, usually set aside for acting and directing classes and as a rehearsal space for both departmental and other productions. Because of time constraints, I conceived and wrote the performance and rehearsed some of the interviews in preparation for the role, but wasn't able to have a public showing. I created a DVD with images and interviews to accompany my live performance, which was divided into several chapters, each of which was titled after one of Ava Coo's lines from the play. The performance itself was shaped around drawing parallels between drag performance and the way I, as an actor, went about building this particular character. The room I chose has mirrored walls that are almost always covered with curtains during the day. As the performance began, I intended to come out from behind the curtains dressed in a bathrobe and wig cap and open the curtains slowly as the

accompanying music began, with the stage set up so that the audience would be facing the exposed mirrors and able to watch a reflection of what I was doing. There was to be a video screen projecting the DVD upstage right. Upstage left was a stool and next to it a table containing eyelashes, makeup, a wig and costume pieces, to be put on near the end of the performance.

I divided the stage into sections, dedicating each location to one of the interviews: center right was a bench, which is where the sections of interview with my colleague Susanne Shawyer would be performed; the segments with drag performer Taylor Trinity were to be performed slightly upstage and center; center left was a chair with a table and telephone, where I would perform the interview excerpts with a friend who spoke with me about femme drag and her extended road trip; and the interview with the drag performer in Los Angeles, which was also done over the telephone, was to be performed on the upstage left stool next to the table of makeup and other drag accoutrements. Each chapter of the performance was to conclude with relevant sections spoken by Ava Coo in *The Strip*, which I was to perform downstage center. The idea behind structuring the performance this way was to emphasize that each of the encounters I had—with each interviewee, with media images and music, with pieces of costume, with the text of the play—was a separate but related cultural and social interaction that comprised the identity of the character.

Because the performance was created to highlight issues of gender, drag and sexuality, I titled the first chapter “I don’t really look like a girl,” and opened the performance with the song “I Will Always Love You” by Dolly Parton. This song holds a

place of great importance in the play: Tina Coo sings it, and calls it one of her favorites. But also, Dolly Parton, with her connotations of excessive femininity and status as a drag icon and, alternately, her deliberate association with "white trash" culture (she is often quoted as saying "It takes a lot of money to look this cheap!") brings up ideas about the performativity of gender and class. In addition, I hoped to connect the lyrics at the beginning of the song with what happens when an actor goes through the process of piecing together a character through interactions with other people: "If I should stay/I would only be in your way/So I'll go. But I know/I'll think of you each step of the way." I thought that it would be useful to make my presence as an actor evident, in the same way that it is important to acknowledge an interviewer's background, identity and biases in ethnographic reporting or historical writing, so I added a still image of myself to the very beginning of the DVD, as the voice of the anonymous drag performer explained that he thinks a lot of drag performers are people who are "unhappy, but are famous and beautiful on stage." Ultimately, though, my goal was to put my presence on the back burner and foreground the interviews and text from the play with which I hoped to bring a new character to life. Like Ava Coo and other drag performers, who transform their own identities by taking on characteristics of women (or men playing women) they have known or admired, I wanted to change myself through re-membering a series of interactions.

The DVD continued with a series of still images of drag icons mentioned in the play (Shirley Bassey, Rosemary Clooney, Madonna), generally famous drag performers on whom I did research (Charles Busch, Lipsynka, Divine), and other legendary

examples of stars who were famous for certain kinds of femininity or gender performance, who were either mentioned by interviewees or who seem to be mentioned quite a bit in discussions of drag (Joan Crawford, Greta Garbo, the women from Dynasty, Anna Nicole Smith, etc.) Behind the still images, I included a segment of the interview in which the drag queen describes his character in a way that also described Ava Coo—a performer who is potty mouthed, alcoholic and washed up, and who is living off the memory of fame. This section ends with the phrase "I'm not impersonating anyone, she's just all of those women, all those performers in my head all ground up together." The images continue as my friend begins to describe what she thinks of as "femme," a role she eventually learned to play through her friendships with gay men and through her work in the sex industry, but with which she had never previously felt comfortable as a child. As the images, interviews, and song played through, I looked back and forth between a mirror and the images on the screen, attempting to shape my body to match the shapes these women's bodies are making. My performance is not yet vocal: I'm merely practicing the physical gestures of femininity in a mirror. Many of these gestures and poses carried over into my performance in the play.

Queerness, Excess and Theatricality as Real Experience

Elin Diamond suggests that, for feminist actors, Brechtian theory provides a technique for questioning the solid basis of identity on which actor training based in realism relies: the actor must historicize herself, making evident the sometimes conflicting cultural circumstances that condition her subjectivity. Through that

historicization, the actor becomes equally as conflicted as the character and as mystified as the spectators regarding her own identity:

> The historical subject *plays* an actor presumed to have superior knowledge in relation to an ignorant character from the past, but the subject herself remains as divided and uncertain as the spectators to whom the play is addressed. This performer-subject neither disappears into a representation of the character *nor* into a representation of the actor; each remains processual, historical, incomplete. ("Brechtian Theory" 1288).

Diamond sees Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt* as being particularly effective in achieving a gender critique in the theatre: "Verfremdungseffekt challenges the mimetic property of acting that semioticians call *iconicity*, the fact that the performer's body conventionally resembles the object (or character) to which it refers" ("Brechtian Theory" 1286). In *The Strip*, by pointing out that even though she *is* a girl she "doesn't really look like one," Ava Coo reveals how borrowing the practice of dressing in feminine drag emphasizes that simply living as a woman always involves a certain degree of *verfremdungseffekt*, given the inability of most people to "conventionally resemble" the perfect picture of the gender they are supposed to inhabit. As Diamond suggests, when gender is brought to the fore in the theatre—in the same way that Ava Coo brings gender to light— one can expose its individual components as a system of signifiers: "The appearance, words, gestures, ideas, attitudes, etc. that comprise the gender lexicon become so many illusionistic trappings to be put on or shed at will." (1286). The result is debunking the

hegemonic myth of "normalcy": "to denaturalize and defamiliarize what ideology makes seem normal, acceptable, inescapable."

When the fabrication of identity is excessive and over-the-top, it appears to call attention to its own deliberate construction; when the invention of identity is believable, it hides the process of choice, repetition, and imitation that went into its creation. As Stephen Bottoms notes, the former "theatricality" is historically considered queer: "To be gay," he summarizes, "is theatrical, and presumably vice-versa" (176). It is important that the re-introduction of the biological body into gender comes out of queer sexuality because of its historical "outsider" status in the United States. Here I quote Esther Newton's work from the late 1960s: "Homosexuals are not accepted as 100 percent Americans, and they are certainly considered "perverse." Homosexuality is a splotch on the American moral order. It violates the rooted assumption that 'masculinity,' a complex of desirable qualities, is 'natural' for (appropriate to) the male" (*Mother Camp* 2). I would argue, however, that queerness and the practice of queering, while they undermine the nationalist myth of "America," are ultimately humanizing and universalizing concepts: they acknowledge the biological and human desire for love, connection and pleasure. In a sense, the historical "outsider" status of gay men, lesbians, bisexual and transgendered persons has made it possible to make use of queer theory as a practice that acknowledges similarity (we all have bodies that crave physical interaction with other bodies and seek out love) while respecting difference (each person's experience of desire and consequent performance of identity—gendered and otherwise—is complex and changing). Ultimately, not only is the queer admission of pleasure and desire human and

"real," so is its theatrical bent: everyone imagines and pretends when constructing an identity. Conversely, what is typically understood as authentic, true and "serious business" always relies, to some degree, on theatricality.

The fourth chapter of my solo performance (the two middle chapters I address later, about geographic border crossing on road trips and visiting over-the-top replicas of historic sites intended for tourists, came in between this and the first), in which I actually intended to go through the process of putting on drag in front of the audience, was entitled "I Know About Hair. I Got a Certificate from the Wilifred Academy of Beauty." While this chapter's placement was intended juxtapose actual border crossing and performances of culture at particular geographic locations with the experience of putting on drag. Three of my interviewees described, in great detail and with great pleasure, the process of putting on wigs and makeup, and I intended for pieces of those interviews to play as I incorporated another important component of Ava Coo's character: I planned to put on eyelashes, wig and costume piece by piece, in the same way that I was putting on bits and pieces of other people's gestural and vocal habits.

One exciting element of doing this performance as a laboratory production was that I was responsible for putting together my own costumes, and I was completely inspired by the descriptions of drag outfits my interviewees gave, as well as by Esther Newton's beautifully detailed descriptions in *Mother Camp*:

> His eyes, which are smallish, green and sad, are rimmed and smudged all around with a thick line of eye liner, and he has gobs of mascara on the lashes. He has carelessly drawn on eyebrows more or less over the place

> where his own are shaved off. All this is partially covered by large dark glasses which he nervously whips on and off when confronting a salesperson or a waitress, but they don't hide the make-up which he has splotched on his face and neck; it has been sweated off in places. His long red hair is combed up all over in an upsweep of curls. When Tiger walks, he sways (the walk referred to as 'swishing' by homosexuals). His arms never hang "naturally" at his sides, but are held out from his body at rigid angles, with long thin hands projecting like plumes. We walk into a cheap department store; somebody whistles. Tiger turns, one hip hooked out, one arm extended, palm turned up, head thrown back at an angle. He declaims, in a loud stagey voice, "My the peasants are restless today." Amoment later he leans over toward me with an ironic smirk, pats his hair into place: "Should I go home and put more make-up on, or do you think I look fantastic enough already?" (9).

Newton goes on to describe an entirely different drag queen, one who is "apologetic" in contrast with Tiger's aggression. He wears 'incredibly short, shorts, cut-off white levis, very tight" (9). I was interested in *Mother Camp* as an ethnographic study of drag performers, but also because it was first published in 1972, just a few years after the Stonewall riots. It seems significant that these "street fairies" were marginalized in every sense: she stresses that their appearances are likely to get them thrown out of some establishments or stared at and harassed at the very least. As Judith Butler points out, subversive performances of identity do carry consequences.

I was interested in using Newton's work as inspiration not just for performing femininity, but also for the aspects of drag that seemed outrageous or excessive. One costume I put together involved very tight shorts with studs, platform shoes and fishnet stockings, a halter top that tied in the front and a long black "Betty Page" wig with bangs. Another wig I chose was a shocking pink bob with glittered pink sunglasses to match, and my final costume was a bright pink gogo dress with a gold-sequined high collar. I picked a platinum blonde wig modeled after Jean Harlow for Ava Coo's final performance to make reference to Hollywood stars (and since the song Ava chooses to perform is "Bette Davis Eyes," the first line of which is "Her hair is Harlow gold …"). I chose extreme and obviously unnatural colors and fabrics, excessively high heels or short shorts, glittered eyeshadow and oversized sunglasses not only because wearing those things was pleasurable and fun for me (and this was and clearly is an important element of drag: it's incredibly playful and fun) but also to make use of the elements of drag that might mark Ava Coo as not only performing femininity, but also performing her role as a "freak" and an outsider—a failure in the straight world, but fantastic in her own imagination and those of other "drunken queens."

The seemingly excessive "outsider" status of the characters' identities in *The Strip* coincides with the "over-the-top" femininity of drag performance, a kind of artifice that is criticized in traditional actor training as "indicating" or pretending. Aston points out that the acting in *The Strip* and the "unreal" nature of the characters were singled out by mainstream critics:

> Significantly, the reviewing 'body' criticized Nagy's characters as 'freaks,' and took against the over-the-top, cartoon-style register of playing that the performers variously adopted for their roles. Yet, it is in the exaggerated style of playing that Nagy locates a sense of the performative, the freedom to play out roles that exist in tension with, but are other than, the social identities assigned to them. (120)

Aston's reading of the play and the performance style for which the characters seemed to call could be understood as a kind of Brechtian technique that questions the "reality" of more understated and apparently authentic approaches. I am interested in what happens when one considers the excess of those characters as not necessarily "fake" or "outside" of the norm, but as simply a more fantastic and fabulous and complex reality. My interest was in seeing how interviewing people for whom drag was a significant part of their lives might give a sense of drag as a real experience.

The DVD for my solo performance continues with an interview with drag performer Taylor Trinity, which I conducted on a digital video camera at an event at an art gallery during the South by Southwest music festival at which he was acting as emcee. The sound on the interview is less than perfect, as people chat and move in and out of the frame, drinking beer and looking at art. Taylor was in full regalia at this event, and I was able to catch bits of an interview between changes of outfit (by happy accident, I chose a location next to three sketches of different women): he went from a sexy but tasteful jeans, heels and black top to what he called "full bitch mode" that involved a full length

PVC dress and platinum blonde wig. The clip I chose for this section is one early in the interview in which he makes a direct connection between drag queens and performers:

> It's probably no different than someone that is in the theatre or a film career. You basically take on a mindset of this façade, character you've created to where it's public, and you have to, while you're in form, live out that façade, that character, 'til you're out of it … 'til the duration of it's over. Me personally? I'm really introverted, somewhat more shy, kind of a more quiet, book-reading stay-at-home and watch movies … But when I'm in character, when I'm Taylor Trinity, it's a whole other ball game. I'm just the butterfly of the party, the life of the party, loud, boisterous, crazy. You have to kinda get … it's taking on a whole 'nother person. It's actually quite therapeutic. Because if you have a side of you that you don't really get to express very often, doing this is like having this whole other personality that you get to put away when you want. And when you're in the mood to let it loose and let it go crazy, you have that other personality to lean on.

Because this was the first section of the performance in which I included an interview that I had conducted in person, and to make reference to the drag practice of lip-synching, my intention was to lip-synch this section to study Taylor Trinity's gestural vocabulary and copy his enactment of femininity with my own (female) body. His interview helped me, again, to find the great pleasure in drag performance, but was also interesting in its implication of *choice*: that acting as an "over-the-top" woman helped him to reveal (and

revel in) a different and contradictory side of his personality than his typical quiet self. I find it interesting that, while he acknowledges that his drag persona is a "character," he doesn't remove her completely from himself: she is simply "another side" of him that he doesn't express in all circumstances.

Presenting the excessive theatricality of drag as authentic or real has a twofold purpose: it gives a sense of the variety of possibility within actual life, and at the same time it breaks down the boundaries that relegate straight experience to that which is legitimate and queer experience to that which is less than true. So in a sense, the performance of drag is a slightly different matter than what Elin Diamond is discussing when she refers to using *verfremdungseffekt*.

> The Brechtian 'not/but' is the theatrical and theoretical analog to the subversiveness of sexual *difference*, because it allows us to imagine the deconstruction of gender – and all other – representations. Such deconstructions dramatize, at least at the level of theory, the infinite play of difference that Derrida calls *écriture* – the superfluity of signification that places meaning beyond capture within the covers of the play or the hours of performance. ("Brechtian Theory" 1287)

By "sexual *difference*," Diamond refers to the Derridean concept that a signifier contains within it the trace of that which it is not. Her suggestion is that the Brechtian actor, imagining a character as whole but not attempting a total transformation into that character, is able to imply that she *is* herself *and* the character. In other words, the

character is one side in the discourse of the play, and the actor, commenting on that character, represents the other. This is an extremely useful possibility for the feminist actor, especially in its implication of the possibility that she can choose to stand outside of the character and comment on it. In my master's thesis, I theorized about the Beckettian "not/not," implying that in Beckett's plays, identity (actor or character, gendered or otherwise) is nothing at all until it is compelled by a particular situation; in the theatre, the actor's identity is compelled by a script, by a director or by an audience. The beauty and usefulness of drag performance for the actor is that it is exceedingly *positive*, active, imaginative and productive in its acknowledgment of possibility. Like Anna Deavere Smith's theory that the actor has the potential to be "all others," the *difference* of drag performers celebrates the extreme fullness and multiplicity of identity: while the feminist actor practicing Brechtian technique might be understood to say, "I am *not* this, *but* this," the drag performer can say (like Madonna) "I am *this*, and sometimes I am *this*, and I have been that person, and I would like to be this other person, as well."

At the same time, Nagy seems to comment in *The Strip* about the excess and performativity through which many people learn "mainstream" American history: representations of national culture are commonly no less overblown than drag performance, but for some reason are given more credence. This was an idea that led me to title the third chapter of my performance "What Was That Looney Tunes Place We Was At Yesterday?" This is a question Ava Coo asks Calvin, referring to one of the many strange and artificial representations of American culture they have visited on their trip. Two of my interviewees described their experiences with tourist sites intended to

celebrate particular aspects of history and culture: my colleague spoke of the village through which she traveled in Croatia that was Tito's birthplace, while my other friend described stopping on her road trip at Dollywood. Each told about her experience of how the "essence" of these places was clearly manufactured for consumption by tourists—my friend spoke of the "country feel" created in Dollywood. Ava and Calvin travel to many of these sorts of places, and I completed this section of my performance with Ava's comment on how contrived they seem:

> Yeah, like Disney World, except instead of Mickey Mouse you got fucking Puritans or something and some half naked yo-yos painted red to look like Indians, except it's so hot the makeup blisters all over their bodies and they end up looking like goddamn lepers, and wacko Kate tells one of them he's gonna end up in the slammer before Christmas on grand theft auto charges, and I could've died, I coulda just died of embarrassment right there in front of the imitation Ye Olde Worlde Martha Washington. (245)

The work I did on this performance led me to realize that one important goal of this multivocal training and rehearsal process is to flip the usual understanding of the relationship between queer gender performance and realism: I wanted to present the excess of drag as believable and authentic and ultimately a humanizing process, while queering the performance of so-called mainstream American identity by pointing out its excesses and artificiality.

Choice, Chance and Creating Community

In the interviews I conducted, I also wanted to learn about the practice of going on a journey without being entirely sure of the destination, both to replicate Ava's own experience and to draw correlations between her trip and the uncertainty of creating a character through a series of unplanned interactions and border crossings. I titled the second chapter of the performance "I Always Wanted a Passport Because They're Glamorous Things to Have …" My intention was to have this section shift from border crossing in terms of gender to the more literal border crossing in terms of nations, states and geography in general. The first section I included was an interview with my colleague, Suzanne Shawyer, a Canadian citizen living in the United States, who had lived in the former Yugoslavia for a year. She explains, "And then … we went across the border. And Mischa had a map, and one of her concerns was that we go across an international rather than an inter-country border because, you know, I had an international passport. And she looked at the map, and it looked like an international border. So we're driving across, and we … um … we pulled out our passports, and the Croatian guard says [makes a waving gesture with her hand] so … we go." She goes on to talk about how she felt like a passenger because she didn't know where she was going, didn't know the language and "I'm just going to enjoy the ride and maybe something interesting will happen. And I'll take my camera, and maybe something will." I then had my other friend talk about how her fantasy road trip turned into a huge coming of age experience and forced her to re-think her identity: "I felt really really lost and displaced. Because, you know, sometimes when you go on a trip you take yourself out of your total

comfort zone and everything that's so familiar and so safe, and everything that you're used to somehow disappears." I ended this section with Ava's breakdown during the telephone conversation with her mother, a point in the play where I chose to have her remove her wig and put aside her ongoing allegiance to artifice:

> God forgive me and I don't know why, but I love you, Ma. I love you, and I don't know where I'm going next, and I don't give a shit about some drunk daddy I never met, and I sure as fuck don't know how you know where I am, but I wish you would just send me some cash and call it a day. (219)

The sense from the interviews and from Ava's scene with her mother was that travel like this inevitably undoes one's sense of security and identity, but through that undoing one becomes a more complex person with greater depth of understanding.

I closed my performance with Ava Coo's final monologue from the play, connecting the culmination of my creation of her identity with her ultimate goal: performing her act on stage in front of an audience (in performance, this speech is broken up with dialogue between other characters). She speaks into a microphone:

> Shit. Whoops, I mean, hey, it's really great, really outstanding to be with you all here tonight. It took me a while to get here, and let me tell you I learned more than I ever wanted to know about the Revolutionary War, the Amish, and other assorted religious types who don't have sex. But I'm with you now, and that's the important thing. I'm gonna sing a special tune for you tonight. It's for this friend of mine, see, who kind of took off

> all of a sudden, without advanced warning, you know? I hate it when that happens, don't you? I thought I hated her a lot, but then she scratched my back and I felt, I don't know, a comfort, a safety, and it was confusing to me because I thought I hated her and ... well I mean it wasn't sexual or nothing 'cause, shit, what do I know about sex anyway? I'm just some chick who pretends to be a chick so people will look at me in a different light so Christ, you know, what's *that* about? (257)

Ava's lip-synch performance of "Bette Davis Eyes" falls apart when her tape of pre-recorded music fails, and she breaks down once again (smashing her guitar—which because of budget constraints, in our performance appropriately ended up being a plastic inflatable costume guitar—on the stage), wondering why nothing ever seems to go the way she dreamed or planned.

I found that my process overlapped with Ava's journey in a lot of ways. Two of my interviews—with my colleague who had traveled abroad and with one of the drag performers—were conducted in person with a mini digital video camera I had purchased for the project with a tax return; the other two—with my friend who was beginning a graduate program in another state and with the Los Angeles-based drag performer—were conducted over the telephone. This was one parallel I found with the character's experience: there was a difference between in-person contact and contact over a distance, but each interaction shaped my understanding of Ava Coo in important ways. While I was clearly using these conversations for a specific end— I needed them for a project, and the participants were doing me a great favor by giving me their time and their

stories—I found that the nervous and sometimes awkward interactions added to the character in ways I did not expect. The mere action of connecting with people added depth and complexity to my understanding of myself, the process of acting, and the play, but perhaps not in a way that I could *visibly* "use." Surprisingly for me, the significant difference this process made in my creation of a character was not specific gestures and mannerisms (although there were a few of those), but the kind of empathy that comes from listening to and trying to figure out how best to repeat people's experiences. I took great pleasure in the interviews themselves. I found all of these people and engaging and fascinating, and I learned a great deal about the pleasure of simply listening and allowing someone to elaborate on the details of his or her life.

As with Ava Coo's travels, there were certainly problems and complications with this process: the fact that I never found a time to publicly perform the character study outside of the context of the play, for example. One of the things that I realized through attempting this process was that forming an identity through a history of interactions is often an unconscious process that happens unexpectedly and over a long period of time, so doing it consciously and with limited time (at the same time as rehearsing a play), is quite frustrating and complicated. The question of which gestures one chooses and why one chooses them makes it essential to continue the conversation with a larger community: doing this work without that ongoing interaction leaves out an important step of the process. In addition, the arduous task of repeating gestures and words over and over until they "settle" in one's body takes more time than most people have, perhaps especially in an academic context when there are other courses to consider, and other

papers to write, etc. In this context, I had not thought out in advance how I would gather members of the community of interviewees together to comment on my process, nor had I engaged a director with whom to work. This left me with the problem of rehearsing alone, being uncertain of whether or not I was accurate in my depictions or making the most ethical or interesting choices for the character.

This made it even more clear how a collective effort in making certain character choices is such an important part of this process, because as Chaikin says, "Until we can hear the dominant voices of those ghosts whom we contain, we cannot control, to any degree, whom we are to become." I think this consciousness, combined with the unpredictability and messiness of real interactions with and observations of people, makes this process a particularly valuable tool for actors who want to both reflect the world around them and choose to make changes in it. Like Ava Coo, whose identity is transformed by the people with whom she comes in contact, I, as an actor, might be changed unconsciously by the observations and interactions I have experienced. But I might also, like her, be a "chick who pretends to be a chick so people will look at me in a different light," and make the *choice* to be aware of how I use the history of my identifications and interactions in a way that might lead people to understand the world differently and appreciate its "endless possibilities."

I chose to title the last chapter of my performance "Me and Calvin are going someplace. I got a job in a nightclub. I'm a nightclub entertainer in demand," and intended to combine the metaphor of a road trip or journey with the completion of Ava Coo's drag transformation. It was to highlight the combination of "going somewhere"

and achieving progress through assertively believing in her status "a nightclub entertainer in demand," while at the same time showing the importance of "me *AND* Calvin" in the development of that identity. I began the section with Taylor Trinity describing a road trip to a gala in New Orleans where she was to receive an award, explaining how she and her friends were pressed for time and had to put on drag on the road to suggest a connection between her experience and adding pieces of people as "costume" on the path to becoming a character. The last interview passage I chose was from the drag performer living in L.A., who commented on how drag expands the possibilities for actors when it comes to making use of the many rich observations of and engagement with the women in their lives because it allows them to be what they wish rather than what they are expected to be:

> In general, I just think, I mean, it was very liberating when I first started because as a gay man I spent a lot of my life studying women, because I, you know, I think a lot of boys, when they're young, they study the guys they wish they were like, you know, the tough guys, and that whole tough guy thing is learned, it's not natural. It's from children studying the football players and the movie stars. So I, you know, most gay men will spend just as much time studying their mothers and their mothers' friends, but we never as actors get to play that, get to use all that rich observation. So when you play a woman you get to comment on all these women you've seen your whole life, and you get to show people what you've seen and noticed about them. … The novelty of getting to cross your legs and

> look beautiful on a chair, it's a novelty for me, so when I get to do it, I'm having fun doing it, I don't take anything for granted 'cause everything's a choice.

Not only does he say important things about choice and agency—performing gender according to whom you "want to be like"— and community and experience—enjoying the observation of mothers and mothers' friends—concisely and beautifully in this quote, he also emphasizes the importance of "fun" or pleasure. Queer performances of gender also have the ability to emphasize how the body, while its adherence to normative rules is undoubtedly required in certain ways for work, is often compelled to abandon those rules and "choose" how it shapes itself according to what is pleasurable, comfortable and sometimes joyful; and that joy and comfort frequently comes from sharing experiences with other people.

Conclusion
"We Can't Remember Ourselves": Producing the Utopian Performative in Actor Training and Rehearsal

I began this dissertation with the metaphor of falling in love, and explained how my fraught and exhilarating relationship with acting and theatre has shaped my life. As I hope I have illustrated through the last two chapters, a good deal of my thinking about the contemporary possibilities of re-imagining the development of character identity in actors' training and rehearsal as an intellectually engaged and community-driven process has been inspired by and developed through my own work with groups of people on particular plays and characters. So I want to finish with acknowledging my indebtedness to a particular play with which I am also deeply enamored, one whose story and dramaturgy for me epitomize love and desire and set off a spark that carried through the rest of my involvement with this topic. In the spring of 2003, several months before I began work on the productions I have discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, I directed Naomi Wallace's *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek* in UT's Laboratory Theatre. Near the end of that play, the character Dalton Chance reveals to the audience (who have become the judge and jury in his murder trial) his story of Pace Creagan's death as she—haunting Dalton's memories in a way that is halfway present and halfway not—fills his narrative with explanations for why she behaved as she did. "I needed you to watch—," she says, "Because we can't watch ourselves. We can't remember ourselves. Not like we need to" (337).

Pace's words describe precisely why the relationship between actors and audiences is an enduring and crucial one. Shannon Baley, my friend and colleague who was the dramaturg for this production, has written specifically about Wallace's fascination with bodies and the transformative power of desire—a preoccupation that becomes particularly evident in the way Pace's relationship with Dalton undoes his ideas about gender and sexuality (245). Wallace has said that that only through the pursuit of desire (a project that sounds quite Stanislavskian) "loneliness is ended" and the transformation of characters' (and people's) identities takes place (240). She has chosen as an epigraph for her play a quote from Percy Bysshe Shelley: "Nothing in the world is single." Pace and Dalton *need* each other in order to piece together their own lives and make them meaningful.

Dalton's desire throughout the play is to kiss Pace on the mouth—an action that is delicious and precious in his imagination, a traditional gesture of love that seems to transcend time and place. But as Baley points out, Dalton and Pace live in a world where a simple act of humanity, love and desire—a kiss on the mouth, for example—seems no longer possible. The characters' bodies have been so ravaged and shaped by the depression that they have to take them apart again before they can be put back together and made whole (a project that sounds both Brechtian and postmodern). Pace tries to enlighten Dalton to this need through performances that both deconstruct and reinvent both of their bodies. She kisses Dalton on the back of the knee, for example, and when he says "I wanted you to kiss me on my mouth," she replies, "Don't you see? Where I was kissing you … it was on your mouth" (313).

In the final scene, she encourages him to imagine an erotic exchange of their bodies, and together they engage in a fantasy in which he becomes her and she him. Commanding him to touch himself but imagine that their two bodies are intertwined, she says "That's right. You're touching me. I want you to touch me. It's going to happen. To both of us." Because he is so entranced by her (as his mother says, "I think you loved that girl"), Dalton plays along and does as Pace wishes; when she finally asks where he can feel her, he has become transported. He replies, "Inside. Everywhere. Pace. (*beat*) You're inside me" (342). Pace shows how, through the combination of their bodies and imaginations, the two have reclaimed power by deliberately taking hold of the language and structures by which their bodies are supposedly imprisoned and changed their world: she exclaims "See? We're somewhere else now" (342). Baley writes of this final exchange,

> This final act of release, a feminist *gestus* and utopian performative rolled into one, allows Dalton and Pace to dissolve and escape the hetero-normative, capitalist system that attempts to yoke them irrevocably into singular bodies and a closed, monologic history. In doing so, he finally remembers (and re-members) her as much as she has re-membered him, rearranging their bodies until they flow into each other, a dialectical and potentially utopian exchange. (246)

Pace and Dalton are both *actors* in this interaction: he is driven by a need to have a connection with her. She wants a connection, as well, but only in a world transformed by her willfulness and imagination, partially achieved by compelling Dalton to recognize

history and use it to transform himself, her, and their world. And Dalton is aware of how his connection with Pace has changed him: in a scene in his jail cell he smashes a glass and uses its pieces to illustrate to his mother how the girl made him aware that the movement of history transforms the world, and that people change each other in a similar way, with the ghost of Pace speaking behind him:

> Dalton: Look. This was sand and heat. Not long ago. Other things, too. Pieces and bits. And now. It's something else. Glass. Blood. And it's broken. (*Picks up a large piece. Nears Gin*) I could cut you open with it. (*Gin slaps his face. He's taken aback, put in his place*).
>
> Dalton: But that's what she did to me. Cut me open and things weren't just things after that. I was just a kid—
>
> Pace: — like any other. You didn't care.
>
> Dalton: I never even thought about it. But then one day I wasn't sure. She did that to me. She made me—hesitate. In everything I did. I was. Unsure. Look. It's not a cup anymore. It's a knife. (308-09)

While our process with this production was relatively straightforward, it led me to think about how the magnetic power of actors (like Pace or like Hollywood stars) and the desire they engender might be demystified and used in a way that inspires an awareness of history and community. Whether it is desire to think or behave *like* an actor and a process of identification, a desire to be someone whom that actor might fall in love with or admire and respect in return, or a more erotic and sensual attraction, it seems to me that the charged energy of this relationship holds a great deal of potential for changing

people's behavior and, consequently, their environments. Actors, as well, have a desire for connection equal to those of their audiences, and suit their performances to best communicate with them. Like Pace, who pleads with Dalton to "look at her" so she can be sure of her own importance and existence and can believe that her actions are not without meaning, actors' very existence depends on their interaction with audiences, and work is drawn out of them by this need. I began to wonder if and how demystifying and opening up this relationship to develop consciousness of history and community might be a means for social change. I thought it would probably involve actors reinventing their own bodies by re-membering the bodies of other people through performance.

At the end of *Utopia in Performance*, Jill Dolan poses this same question: "How can we take the space opened in performance and imagination and actively encourage utopian performatives? Isn't this what any group of actors and directors tries to do each time they set out to create performance?" (169). As a person who has been involved in acting and performance from a young age, I agree that many of the actors, playwrights, designers, directors and others involved in creating theatre begin with intentions that involve a desire to communicate and connect, and that the liveness and ephemerality of their work is often utopian in impulse. Dolan suggests that the feelings aroused by these efforts may be enough to provide the conditions and imagined possibility for a better world:

> The utopian performative, by its very nature, can't translate into a program for social action, because it's most effective as a *feeling*. Perhaps that feeling of hope, or that feeling of desire, embodied by that suddenly

> hollow space in the pit of my stomach that drops me into an erotics of connection and commonality—perhaps such an intensity of *feeling* is politics enough for utopian performatives. (19)

Here, she echoes Anne Bogart's respect for emotion and response and the preciousness of their unpredictability in her statement that "It is not the director's responsibility to produce results but, rather, to create the circumstances in which something might happen" (124). As an actor, though, I wonder in what ways the conditions of my training and preparation can be infused with the methodologies I have learned in courses on ethnographic performance and community-based theatre, feminist and queer theory and other identity-based solo performance and performance art. I wonder how the interest in capturing the essence of "real" experience that fascinated Diderot and Stanislavski and The Group and The Living Theatre and Anna Deavere Smith might be combined with the consciousness and historicity of Marx and Brecht and the powerful imaginations of other great actors, playwrights and scholars in ways that create circumstances more conducive to social action in the current historical and cultural environment. Rather than making the conditions for working on plays in more traditional "American" theatrical settings abide by a particular set of rules determined by market standards, how might the actors and audiences who are committed to re-staging old plays and creating new ones communicate with each other and in that way develop changing circumstances for each production? Taking one step further Dolan's idea that *feelings* that instill in audiences a desire for change are enough, what if the feelings and imagined possibilities that result from this exchange *are* social action? What if the "something that happens" in the theatre, the

feelings and desire and change that mark the bodies of a community of people through their mutual interaction and communication with a group of artists *is* democracy and change?

In contrast to the contemporary feeling common among actors that they have minimal power to effect change, the initial drive behind the work of philosophers like Diderot, Stanislavski and members of The Group Theatre was to expose acting as a process of human labor rather than a mystical process of inspiration that was beyond the performer's control. The concept of actor training is humanist and, to a certain degree, Marxian in impulse: it illuminates the ways in which the body of the actor is a tool and, in the right circumstances, can be controlled and shaped *by the actor* to make meanings, reflect existing behavior and imagine different ways of living. At the same time, actor training devoted to reflecting "true" behavior has revolutionary potential because it reveals the ways in which living is an interactive process—an actor must make an effort to communicate with other actors and examine his or her relationship to a group in order to believably represent the world. As I suggested in chapter one, the humanist impulse behind actor training does not automatically make it exclusionary: on the contrary, it is revolutionary in its suggestion that worlds are shaped by people moving their bodies and interacting with each other.

The revolutionary impulse of acting as a humanist practice lies in its *potential*, however, and not always in its practice. It is without a doubt limited by certain historical and cultural circumstances. And like other products of the Enlightenment—the French and American Revolutions, for example, and their devotion to democracy and

"freedom"—it became exclusionary rather than truly being used for the good of all humanity. Actor training may have resulted in a new awareness of people and their ability to make change, but it was also mired in the economics of capitalism and came to be associated with values that were geared towards maintaining a status-quo middle-class morality that ensured that those who had acquired money and power might keep their status at the great expense of other groups. Consequently, because it was associated with the rise of capitalism and developed in conjunction with an increasing need for actors and their training to become sellable products, attempts to objectify actors' interactive and detailed use of memory and imagination came to be understood as a static practice—"The System"— that prioritized the believable reproduction of certain kinds of identities and values. Like Dalton and Pace in *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*, actors had to find other means to break out of what Baley calls "the hetero-normative, capitalist system that attempts to yoke them irrevocably into singular bodies and a closed, monologic history."

From the middle of the Twentieth Century through its end, then, actors who entered professional training programs in the United States were rarely made fully aware of the intellectual and revolutionary history of the work they were preparing to do. Rather than engaging in an ongoing dialectical process, actors in BFA and MFA acting programs were encouraged to imagine acting as a static and objective craft that, above all else, involved "truthful playing in imaginary circumstances." The ability to "just be" a character convincingly becomes more important for a successful American actor in the twentieth century than a consideration of ethical practices of representation, for example; individual identity and desire, while they are most successful when clearly faithful to the

wishes of a playwright or director and therefore determined from the outside, are prioritized—an actor must learn to create the illusion of free will rather than questioning what that concept really means. In addition, instead of being aware of his or her work as a process that involves interaction and conversation, the actor must be sellable as an individual personality. In this context, identities that uphold white, middle-class, straight values continued to be perpetuated and celebrated through the work of "good" and professional actors, who were being trained in programs increasingly geared toward "legitimate" work to feed a commercial market.

As I pointed out in the second chapter, the professionalization and commercialization of acting developed at a time when the spread of capitalism happened through deliberate and obvious colonization and occupation of land and the control and repression of the bodies of people deemed Others. The nationalist project of modernism relied on drawing and maintaining boundaries, and resulted in/was the result of a binary way of thinking: Us versus Them. While humanism held the seeds of being a populist, democratizing and potentially radical development, in this context what was deemed universal and human was, in fact, clearly white, male, Christian and heterosexual, and the exclusionary practices associated with it were devastating for people not meeting those qualifications. Consequently, particularly in the United States, the supposed objectivity, truth and authenticity required of professional actors severely limited opportunities for people who fell outside of dominant categories of identity, or who did not wish to reproduce repressive notions of their own identity groups. Many non-whites, women,

lesbians, gays and bisexuals, and working-class people found it difficult if not impossible to maintain careers in the theatre or even in film.

After World War II, with the advent of the Cold War and the continued pressure to accept capitalism and American nationalism as one and the same, Bruce McConachie notes that the environment, dominated by metaphors of containment, promoted rigid conceptions of inside and outside. Especially for artists, McCarthyism had the consequence of excluding people who lived in this country legitimately (whether their families were compelled to come here by the allure of prosperity and freedom or were forcibly removed from their homes and brought here as slaves), simply by virtue of their beliefs, ethnicity, gender, sexual practices or economic status: it became possible to be "un-American" even if one was born and raised within the geographic boundaries of the United States. Many artists—particularly actors and directors—who had initially been interested in work that was revolutionary in both form and content were forced to choose between maintaining careers in their chosen fields and continuing to be outwardly and vocally dedicated to social change. This rift eventually became evident in training programs for theatre: people who wished to pursue more traditional theatre forms (and film or television) as a career were encouraged to enroll in BFA, MFA or other professional training programs, and those more specifically interested in socially engaged, experimental or "political" theatre were directed to the less lucrative but more theoretically inclined field of performance studies.

The curricula of these two types of programs became equally divided. Stanislavski-based training, with its focus on internal psychology, emotional truth,

external conflict and individual progress, dominated the realm of professional programs. Performance studies became the purview of "Outsiders." These academic programs were where students engaged with experimental theatre and its interest in ensemble interaction, non-realistic forms and feminist, queer and Marxist theory. Performance studies also encompassed the interdisciplinary and postmodern practice of performance art. Autobiographical performance by non-whites, women, people who claimed queer sexuality and others who wished to resist the competitive and money-oriented values of capitalism was a means of asserting subjectivity and drawing attention to the effects of culture and language on the body. This kind of performance was often concerned with questions of hybridity and straddling borders; it challenged notions of a stable and unified America or a universal "human" by emphasizing difference, multiplicity and internationalism. Performance Studies, in fact, valued its stance *outside* of mainstream culture: its marginalized status made possible incredibly valuable collaborations with other fields and art forms, exploring risky topics and experimenting with formal strategies that resisted the market-driven values of mainstream cultures. Interestingly, while professional programs were dominated by Stanislavski-based training, they often introduced other, more "externally-based" practices. Performance Studies, on the other hand, outside of critical analyses of traditional theatre, realism, and actor training, steered clear of The Stanislavski System or The Method. Because of suspicion that any methodology claiming objectivity and universal truth hid motives of colonialism and repression, those tools were all but discarded instead of being taken apart with the

intention of finding productive ways of transforming them for use in contemporary contexts.

Solo performance art became fully established as a genre and Performance Studies gained increasing credence as a field of scholarship around the same time as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the end of the Cold War, a fact which in many ways made the postmodern border-crossing tactics and focus on hybridization less effective as resistant strategies. Capitalism itself, while it still relied on American nationalism and violent occupation, also began to work increasingly on and through individual bodies using a rhetoric of inclusion that gradually incorporated the entire globe. Althusser termed this hegemonic process "interpellation" and Foucault called it "biopower": each individual body was implicated equally in the spread of capitalist values, as the participation of each one was supposedly free and voluntary. At the same time, advances in electronic technology made possible the ostensible erasure of bodies, boundaries, time and space, eliminating geographical determinations of difference with increasing speed. While this process makes the assertion of difference and the focus on bodies embraced by performance art increasingly important, it also attests to the metaphoric power of humanist rhetoric.

If, as Joseph Roach suggests, actor training throughout history has reflected philosophical and scientific views of the body, I would suggest that, in turn, views of the body follow general cultural metaphors that also inform geographic and ideological concepts of national identity. While the strategic formation of Performance Studies as a resistant discipline was incredibly useful in the postmodern economic and political

environment, the increased spread of global corporate capitalism has combined similar relativist, border-crossing strategies with a powerful rhetoric of universality, human *need* (to have and produce more money, primarily) and concepts of "freedom" and "democracy" to its advantage. Significantly, though, these corporate tactics also rely on electronic technology and its ability to all but erase time, space and, significantly, the suffering and change of actual human bodies—global capitalist values can easily associate image with truth because they lack a basis in human, embodied experience. Critical pedagogy has recognized this historical situation, and made attempts to re-introduce bodies into the classroom in order to increase students' awareness of how history has shaped their bodies, but also what role students' real bodies and their experiences play in shaping the world. Essentially, I am searching for ways that teachers and practitioners of acting can incorporate ideas from critical pedagogy to reflect concepts of *actual bodies* that involve a physical negotiation of global, human, unified ideals, new technologies and the generative power of desire; but in a way that also deals with the daily facts, experiences and values of real human bodies.

In terms of acting, I have noted the ways in which Anna Deavere Smith's work models a dialectical philosophy of the body that reflects both a Marxian concept of history as a moving totality that incorporates difference and what Lakoff and Johnson call an "experientialist" view that negotiates between objectivity and subjectivity, the intellect, emotion, imagination and the desire to, as Deavere Smith herself puts it, "cross the bridge" between self and Other. Creating performances based on this model as one step of training and rehearsal processes develops an understanding of body,

consciousness and identity as being constantly transformed by interactions with other people and other elements of history and culture; actors retain the useful elements of Stanislavski-derived training (desire, empathy, and identification), while also being conscious (in a Brechtian way) of the degree to which a character's attributes (and an actor's choices regarding them) are learned and reproduced socially and culturally.

In some ways, Deavere Smith's process is like the utopian re-imagining of their bodies that Pace and Dalton go through in *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*. Rather than engaging communities in a conversation only about an actual historical event or one issue such as race, however, I am interested in borrowing the same "documentary" techniques using plays, theatrical performances and characters as the imaginative and creative events around which actors base their conversations with community members. Certainly, issues of gender, ethnicity and class will be significant to these dialogues, as are actual historic experiences—how those issues and events inform the choices made in developing a unified identity to be performed by an actor in a play seems a possible way of overcoming the Cartesian bias that has prevented actors from recognizing the extent of their power, intellectual capacity, and civic responsibility. It also reaches for a reconciliation of the distinction between the academic discipline of Performance Studies and the more utilitarian practice of Theatre training.

This methodology is equally indebted, in many ways, both to Stanislavski and to Anna Deavere Smith, whose work I see as extensions of each other rather than drastic departures. Stanislavski's work was undertaken in the legacy of Enlightenment efforts to define tools that might be applied as standardized scientific disciplines, but in actual

practice his techniques began in an attempt to solve the problems of a particular role in a particular realistic play, with the goal of finding ways to make his performance of a role more clearly reflective of life in the context of the play's circumsances. While he may have begun each process applying the standards and techniques he had previously developed, his ideas and ways of working changed with each project on which he worked: the characters and the scripts themselves informed shifts in his methodology. In the same way, Deavere Smith goes about her work attempting to reproduce the words and physical responses of her interlocutors as accurately as possible, resulting in changes to her own body that vary with each event on which she works and each person with whom she speaks. The process about which I have written was a direct descendent of this kind of work: I looked to the form and content of the plays themselves, the characters and the people working on them, and the context of the productions as blueprints for shaping the training and rehearsal processes.

Instead of the commonly accepted notion that it is only the playwright who truly imagines the world of a theatrical production and therefore can effect change, this methodology takes its cue from Raymond Williams in considering that, rather than *determining* the behavior of actors, it sets limits or "exerts pressure." Including Anna Deavere Smith's process allows the play to become the basis for dialogue, so that the participants in conversations surrounding it recycle, interpret and change the pieces of the play or of history, imagining them into a new possible future event. Charles Mee's work, on which I based the third chapter, provided the inspiration for this format: his intertextual, hypertext writing provides a form that calls for the participation of bodies as

much as it provides the language and structure that shape the characters and production. Like Mee's plays, beyond giving a general theoretical framework, this methodology of actor training can only be written about in the context of specific cases, since it relies on the changing meanings produced with each new group of people, texts and historical conditions. The work we did on our production of Mee's *The Trojan Women: A Love Story* applied to the work of the actor his description of artistic work of all kinds: "it's this kind of wonderfully paradoxical creation that's both a product of the culture and of some individual's sensibility. But the tendency to choose that it's either one or the other is probably an oversimplification."

Our project, then, developed as a "workshop production" for the Payne Theatre in the University of Texas Department of Theatre and Dance in the post-September 11 context of the initial stages of the war in Iraq, was an amalgam of many different kinds of texts. It began with the basics of Stanislavski and Viewpoints training, community-based interviewing and solo performance, Euripedes and Berlioz and the various pieces of script Mee chose to fill in those plays, and some songs collected from the public domain. We began with a desire to find some kind of empathy with victims of war and raise questions about its consequences, and, inspired by the play's dialectical structure, also to wonder about the possibilities for redemption through love and connection. Because this was live theatre, our interest was also in, literally, "fleshing out" Mee's body-focused language: how could our physical interaction with all of these different texts make a difference in a supposedly disembodied, technology-and-money driven world? The result was a closely-knit and energetic ensemble of actors whose embodiments of conversations

with victims of various kinds of trauma, people who were or had been in love, people who were concerned with shaping their bodies in particular ways, a mercenary who made money through violence, a sex worker who made money through pleasure, and others, informed their understandings of mythic characters. Rather than only being individual meditations on ideas about war and love, the actors' interpretations of character in performance were ghosted by traces of the experiences of embodying their research and conversations, and had the potential to be more engaged and transformational processes.

My continued experimentation with this process allowed me to consider how using such an intertextual methodology for acting might raise questions about how gender is both culturally inherited and interpreted through individual embodied experience. I was inspired by Ava Coo in Phyllis Nagy's play *The Strip,* whose performances of gender are intended to be subversive of dominant concepts of gender—she is "a girl who pretends to be a girl so people will look at her in a different light"—but by the play's end also end up being inclusive and humanizing as her idea of success and identity changes. She becomes aware of how significant the people with whom she interacts have been to her success and to the development of her own gendered identity, and acknowledges that—instead of an abstract idea of success and "being somebody"—it could be her body's need for affection, love, comfort and pleasure that compel her particular performances of gender.

Like the drag performers I interviewed and like the character who led me to conduct these interviews, I began to think of the ways that this process makes possible a theory of identity that is multiple and positive and full of possibility rather than exclusive

and singular. While identity and presence are most powerful when they make strong, bold, active choices and statements, this power actually arises from a series of multiple identifications that periodically (and temporarily) coalesce into the illusion of unity through the body of an actor (like observations and interactions with many women come together to form the identities of drag queens, or like stars gather strength from the multiplicity of contradictory texts that make up their personae). Through taking the step to make explicit the interactive journey and the need for border crossing, the variety and contradiction, and the physical exchanges involved in the formation of a persona, it becomes less necessary to *subvert* gender identity; acknowledging it as a complicated and multiple process of *choice* might give an actor license to revel in the pleasure and power of acting like a woman (or man). That is, through exposing *everyone's* gender and *everyone's* desire as queer is an alternative model of global humanism that can be strong in its actions while avoiding the exclusionary and rigid pressures of traditional white, straight and male capitalist individualism.

Using these plays—Naomi Wallace's *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek,* Charles Mee's *The Trojan Women: A Love Story* and Phyllis Nagy's *The Strip*—as the frames through which I planned to re-imagine traditional models of actor training and hope to overcome the rift between the scholarly projects of performance studies and the practice of professional acting steered my thinking about an experiential and interactive practice for actors in a particular direction. Clearly, this is simply the tip of the iceberg where this process of training and rehearsal is concerned, and its application in other contexts provides ample room for more research and development. For example, I would like to

agree with those people who think of Stanislavski-based training as being applicable to any kind of play, but not in a necessarily objective sense—it certainly can be applied in any context, with the provision that the meanings resulting from its use will always be different. In the same way, I would suggest that an interactive, community-and-interview-based process might be applied in any theatrical context and used with any kind of script, even though my thinking about it was born through work on contemporary and primarily postmodern plays whose theoretical underpinnings are similar to those of the process itself.

I have continued my own research on the process, for example, through teaching an acting course on characterization at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas. During the first semester I taught the course, Spring 2006, I gave students the option choose a character and scene from one of four different plays that seemed to hold a lot of potential for characterization: Chekhov's *The Three Sisters,* Tony Kushner's *Angels in America,* Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Charles Mee's *Big Love*. There were only ten students in the class, and half of them chose *Angels in America*. All but one of the students were women, and they varied slightly in ethnicity and national identity: two students were from Africa, one was born and raised in Texas but identified herself as half-Palestinian, and the rest were white and Texan. For the most part, these students chose to focus on difference in their choice of characters. Two pairs of women chose the scene from which the play's title is taken—the conversation in a coffee shop between Belize, an African-American former drag performer, and Louis, a Jewish gay

man—they were performing, for the most part, across race, gender and sexuality (although one of the African students chose Belize as her character).

Across the board, however, the interview process the students undertook didn't result in a focus on the cultural *differences* between them and their interviewees or their characters. When I asked the students what they learned from the process of talking to other people who had some point of intersection with their characters, they all stated that they had more empathy for their characters' plights. The weight of Belize and Louis's relationship with Prior, who is dying of AIDS, became more clear to all of them, and the emotional values of the scene were richer than one might ever expect from nineteen or twenty-year-old actors in a small college town in Texas. When cultural difference between the actors and their characters was incredibly evident through the language of the scene itself, their emotional *sameness* and identification was underlined through the interview process.

This semester, Spring 2006, I decided to choose a different kind of play altogether. All of the students in my characterization class read only one play: Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*. The class is larger this time—twenty students—and as a result has even more demographic diversity. I was surprised that only two or three students were already familiar with a play that I consider to be one of the most canonical plays for junior high and high school acting students in the United States, but I chose it because I suspected that it would be extremely familiar to them and to their interviewees. We are very early in the process of the course, and students have read the play at this point and done some dramaturgical research on the play itself, the historical context of its writing,

and have also considered the differences in concepts of daily life, marriage and death—the topics of each of the plays three acts—in various cultures. *Our Town* is understood by some to be a universal picture of humanity, as Donald Margulies writes in his introduction:

> The perfection of the play starts with its title. Grovers Corners belongs to all of us; it is indeed *our* town, a microcosm of the human family, genus American. But in that specificity it becomes all towns. Everywhere. Indeed, the play's success across cultural borders around the world attests to its being something much greater than an American play: it is a play that captures the universal experience of being alive (xvii).

Already, however, through the research they have done, students have noticed the specificity of the play to the historical circumstances it represents. As the stage manager says in Act I,

> So I'm going to have a copy of this play put in the cornerstone and the people a thousand years from now'll know a few simple facts about us … So—people a thousand years from now—this is the way we were in the provinces north of New York at the beginning of the twentieth century.—This is the way we were: in our growing up and our marrying and our living and in our dying. (33)

I also chose the play because of Wilder's experimentation with form: the lack of detailed, realistic sets, as one of the students pointed out in discussion, has the effect of giving focus to the actor's bodies: if someone has to pantomime cooking, for example, or

serving dinner, or working, the audience pays attention to *how* each character performs those actions. No interviews have been conducted yet, but I have encouraged students to choose interviewees whose cultural backgrounds are different than their own or those of the characters in the play to see how difference enlivens their understandings of performing *Our Town* in a supposedly global cultural context: how might we turn *Our Town* into *Our Globe*?

One of the most significant elements of this training and rehearsal process with which I have unfortunately dealt very little is how it fares on the reception end. I am interested, clearly, in producing conditions conducive to utopian performatives, but documenting and analyzing the responses of interviewees and allowing those to inform the choices of actors in performance is perhaps the most important area for further research on this methodology. One of Jill Dolan's primary questions in *Utopia in Performance* surrounds the documentation of audience affect; if, as she suggests, "Audiences form temporary communities, sites of public discourse that, along with the intense experience of utopian performatives, can model new investments in and interactions with variously constituted public spheres," (10) then "How can we chronicle an audience's response, in the moment of performance" (169)?

It seems to me that if the relationship between these temporary communities (which also include actors and other theatre practitioners) is set up as a conversation rather than simply one of spectators witnessing a representation, the *use* of audience responses in rehearsal and production concepts is even more significant because it becomes an essential part of how decisions are made. Dwight Conquergood wrote about

this kind of exchange in the changing methods of ethnographic reporting in the field of anthropology: "The project of radical empiricism changes ethnography's traditional approach from Other-as-theme to Other-as-interlocutor, and represents a shift from monologue to dialogue, from information to communication" (17). How might this process, in which audiences become interlocutors, document interactions before, during and after performances in ways that transform the resulting grounds for further performance of plays, scripts and characters? What effect does it have on the experience of actors' virtuosity and presence to have been a part of their process from its initial stages? Is it empowering for audiences to recognize the ways they have informed and possibly changed the process of representation? Is there a feeling of pride having taken a direct part in an actor's transformation into a character? Can interviewees/audience members recognize their contributions in the final performance, and how is that a departure from their responses to previous plays in which they did not feel like a bigger part of the conversation?

My interest in the importance of including the audience as part of the conversations in rehearsal and performance and finding ways to document their participation is also connected to another important area of research on this methodology: the importance of new electronic technology for the work of actors in a global climate. In the course on *Our Town*, I am requiring students to create Myspace profiles for their characters. This assignment involves adding both interviewees and the other characters from the class as friends, in order to turn the project into an online community. Not only do I think it will be interesting and fun for students to use a format used to invent an

online "virtual" identity in the process of creating a character, I also think the "Myspace" phenomenon itself mirrors the kind of process the students are undertaking: these profiles include subjective thoughts in the form of blog entries, for example, but also allow students to post images and songs that influence their impressions of character identities and to accept comments from classmates and interviewees that I hope will inform the choices they make when they perform scenes. It also occurs to me that technology has driven not only views of the body throughout history, but also has shaped concepts of acting in important ways: Stanislavski's attempts at reproducing life more "objectively" came at a time when photographic imagery was increasing in clarity and specificity. Actors had at their disposal the possibility of looking at photographs of people who matched the types of characters they were to represent. Anna Deavere Smith began to work at a time when video technology made it possible for her to view her interviewee's responses over and over again in the interest of attempting accuracy. As technology continues to become more precise and user-friendly, how does it affect actors' performances of others? At the same time, how can actors tap into the democratizing potential of internet technology that makes possible online conversation with people across the globe? How do these technologies that make both empirical accuracy and interactive conversation more feasible inform actors' live and local performances of plays and characters? The use of technology in acting also runs the risk, however, of excluding people who don't have access to computers—in this case, how can actors trained in this kind of environment recognize how technology and the use of it affects their work and

their perception of identity, while not making their processes contingent on the use of electronic media?

All of my experimentation with this methodology, thus far, has been in academic settings, and even if some of the work has been done with students who intend to go on to professional careers, the division between theatre in academia and in the professional realm still exists, maintaining the dilemma that Robert Brustein suggests actors face: social activism or a comfortable career? Ultimately, I hope that this process might be used successfully in professional settings, as well: it is my feeling that this would be the most effective means of replacing or at least supplementing the financial goals of most theatre with increasingly humanist ones. But again, resources inevitably exert pressure on actors to work in a particular way: a professional actor would have to make the choice to devote time outside of rehearsal and performances—of which there is precious little—to interviewing community members and creating solo performances and maintaining contact whether online or in person, most likely at the expense of relaxation or family relationships or other important life pursuits. In essence, this process would require actors to have *two* full time jobs. This is another area ripe for further investigation: how might actors trained in academic settings using this process find ways to incorporate it into their professional lives?

Ideally, I think, theatres would have to be willing to make allowances for this and, possibly, incorporate "festival" settings in their seasons more frequently. I envision this happening as a series of events: symposia on the play being produced, workshops, open rehearsals, installations including pieces of videotaped interviews, interactive websites,

evenings of solo performance by actors based on their interview processes, and, as the culmination of this series, a production of the play itself. Would this kind of setting actually invigorate people's desire to attend theatre? If there was the possibility of recognizing themselves or their neighbors in a staged production, would theatre seem more relevant to some people who don't usually attend? Might this even stimulate the economy of regional theatres if more people took an interest in subscribing to a season in which they actually had some participation and vested interest? How might democratizing actors' characterizations actually change the perception of acting as a profession and live theatre as an institution?

These are statements of grand and hopeful possibilities, but I hope that the initial work I have done on historicizing actors' training and rehearsal processes in the United States, theorizing changes that may make their work more relevant in a global context and discovering how this theory applies in particular production contexts might generate significant interest in further experimentation and investigation. My hope is that small changes in the conditions of actors' training and practice—in individual college courses, for example—can help people recognize the power theatre has to imagine and transform the grounds for future action. I believe that through opening up their work on plays and characters to conversation with larger communities, actors can see the work they do as a powerful arena for civic dialogue and activism, and will recognize both the significant emotional, intellectual and physical power they can possess and the great social responsibility that accompanies that power. By setting the conditions for these conversations between actors and audiences in a way that encourages utopian physical

exchanges of bodies, identities, and imaginations, maybe these temporary communities can experience both difference and human empathy by engaging in an interactive process of labor with a group of people, can understand how their work imagines and enacts new possible conditions for living, and can say (with a confidence that was previously taken over by people with more exclusionary and repressive goals), “See? We’re somewhere else now.”

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